

Ibsen as Understood in Bangladesh
***Ghosts* and *A Doll's House* seen through the Lenses of Gender**



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Chapter 1: Introduction

Ibsen's plays have been a wonderful source for understanding the position of myself as a human being, and then, as a woman. The dream of studying his plays in depth has long swayed my student days, and finally it has partially been accomplished through this thesis. I say partially, because the extent of this MPhil thesis is not enough to envelop all aspects of the topic that has been narrowed for the sake of time and space. Yet, I believe that this study will be helpful in both documentation and in understanding Ibsen in a different cultural context.

Point of Departure

According to the Russian literary scholar, Mikhail Bakhtin, the greatness of a literary text lies in its flexibility to be adapted to any cultural situation at any time:

The historical life of classic works is in fact the uninterrupted process of their social and ideological re-accentuation. Thanks to the intentional potential embedded in them, such works have proved capable of uncovering in each era and against ever new dialogising backgrounds ever newer aspects of meaning; their semantic context literally continues to grow, to further create out of itself (Bakhtin 1981:421)

Ibsen's plays have passed the test of time and in Bangladesh they have unfolded diverse meanings in the period they have been staged. Ibsen performances in Bangladesh were initiated in the 90s and onwards when Bangladesh was experiencing a vast change in developing sectors like health, gender, population, etc. As according to Erika Fischer-Lichte (2008a: 96), "the staging of Ibsen's plays in Western and non-Western cultures at the turn of the last century was linked – albeit in different ways – to the process of modernization and its resulting problems," I claim that Bangladeshi theatre also felt some need for Ibsen in the process of modernization and globalization. A special focus has been on the idea of gender equity. Long before his introduction to Bangladeshi theatre, Ibsen was known to the academic world as a revolutionary playwright who wanted to change the status of women. He wanted to reveal the rottenness of the bourgeois family life where one part of his pivotal attention was women's exploitation by the social institution called family.

In this study, I will discuss the intentional potential embedded in Ibsen's plays for exploring gender issues. Based on the adaptation and reception of two of his plays in

Bangladesh, *Ghosts* and *A Doll's House*, I will claim that the well-established idea about the two plays' relation with gender awareness and women's emancipation influenced their adaptations and reception to a remarkable degree in Bangladesh.

Basic questions

Bangladesh is a South Asian country with several socio-political problems that are characteristic of the third world countries. Poverty, political unrest, lack of education, over population, etc. are the major among hundreds of problems.

Ibsen's plays have been dominating Bangladeshi theatre for years and two facts become crucial while discussing Ibsen in the country. The first is, every year Bangladesh receives a large amount of grant as a development partner of Norway. The other one is, although it was not the first to stage Ibsen, Centre for Asian Theatre (CAT), the first professional theatre organization in Bangladesh, has staged most of the Ibsen plays. CAT is the only theatre organisation that has received the Norwegian Government's money as an agreement partner. Monetary involvement may have had some influence behind promoting Norwegian literature and culture in Bangladesh. What I will discuss in this thesis is accordingly if Ibsen's plays are received with special attention in Bangladesh only for financial reasons, or whether they have some other appeal. As Marvin Carlson believes: "As a public art devoted to cultural self reflexivity, theatre has not only reflected but often helped to reinforce and to crystallize norms of social action," (Carlson 2006: 3) I would try to answer the question: Has Bangladeshi theatre appropriated Ibsen to represent and reinforce local cultural norms and nuisances?

What has made it possible for a Norwegian playwright, writing in the nineteenth century, to be discussed and found relevant in the context of the Twentieth century Bangladesh? More appropriately, my basic questions are: What is the most important factor that has influenced the understanding of this foreign playwright in Bangladesh? Was it money, foreign aid, or something else, that was already there in our culture, which contributed to our appropriation of Ibsen as one of us?

Hypothesis

My main hypothesis is that a play finds its meaning in a different culture through some ideological questions. Ibsen's plays display some major socio-political issues related with the socio-political situation in Bangladesh. Before the financial assistance of Norwegian Government, there must already have been a potential interest in Ibsen in Bangladesh.

To be specific, my hypothesis is that the acceptance of Ibsen in Bangladesh is related largely with the gender relations and the growing gender awareness. Contemporary gender situation, more than anything else, has influenced the understanding of Ibsen in Bangladesh. Even if money had played an important role in promoting a Norwegian playwright, there must have been interests other than money and the most important of them was, possibly, concern for gender equality. Two major plays by Ibsen, *A Doll's House* and *Ghosts*, were adapted at a time when Bangladesh was going through a vast change in gender sector, and thus Ibsen's name got involved with the socio-political scenario. Consequently, he was accepted as a representative of contemporary gender debates.

The readers and the audience have interpreted Ibsen from their perspectives and have imposed new meaning to the plays. The meaning has come from their experience, from what they, in 'Ibsenian' term, have 'lived through' (Ibsen 1964: 150). The question how Ibsen and Bangladesh convene each other specifically, refers to some points through which the plays are appropriated in Bangladesh. Gender is a key word in this discussion which is understood from the Bangladeshi point of view.

The major discussion will be concentrated around supporting my claim:

Bangladeshi audience has extracted meaning of *Ghosts* and *A doll's House* in their own way. The major factor that has influenced to understand the plays is gender. Additionally, the common elements within the gender hierarchies in Ibsen plays and Bangladesh have made it easy to identify the plays as Bangladeshi experience. Thus gender has been working as an active factor in popularising Ibsen in Bangladesh, as it has already stirred the country's conscience on women's agendas.

Theoretical Foundation:

The most important theoretical foundation for this discussion is Erika Fischer-Lichte's comment:

Since the audience is presented solely with objects that are not culturally bound to a specific meaning, any spectator from any culture can receive the objects presented in the context of their own culturally specified experience and deduce meaning. (Fischer-Lichte 2005: 32)

Fischer-Lichte has stated that that any performance gets its meaning from its audience. The performance may have a meaning in itself, but the presence of a particular audience can apply a very new meaning to it; as its meaning lies in the 'bodily co-presence of actors and spectators' demonstrated by Max Herrman, which is further elucidated by Fischer -Lichte as a requirement of "two groups of people, one acting and the other observing" (Fisher-Lichte 2008 b: 38). She also emphasizes on 'a given period of shared lifetime' when their encounter, which is 'interactive and confrontational,' produces the performance that she calls 'event' (ibid: 38). I have chosen to consider the performances of *Ghosts* and *A Doll's House* as events that extracted meaning from the culturally constructed set of mind of everyone involved with the performances.

When any Ibsen play is adapted in a Bangladeshi context, it becomes 'intercultural', and according to Rustom Bharucha:

What is needed in any study of interculturality in everyday life, which is an infinitely wider and more elusive field of research than intercultural performance, is some critical perspective on the temporality and contextualization of borrowings. (Bharucha 2000: 32)

Bangladeshi Ibsen performances are accordingly intercultural, if temporality and contextualization of borrowings are justified. What may justify the adaptation of *Ghosts* and *A Doll's House*, I contend, are the contexts in which they were staged.

On September 10, 1874 in Christiania (Oslo), towards the end of his stay after he finally visited his homeland after ten years, Ibsen appeared in public to be honoured by a procession of university students, and he made a speech in which he pointed out his own idea about a poet and his creation. Ibsen's speech can also be relevant here when the reception of a particular text by its readers or the meaning of a performance given by its audience is taken into consideration:

Now, what does it mean to be a poet? It was a long time before I realized that to be a poet means essentially to see; but mark well, to see in such a way that whatever is seen is perceived by his audience just as the poet saw it. But what has been lived through can be seen in that way and accepted in that way. And the secret of modern literature lies precisely in this matter of experiences that have been personally lived through. All that I have written these last ten years I have lived through in spirit. But no poet lives through anything in isolation. What he lives through, all of his countrymen live through with him. If that were not so, what would bridge the gap between the creating and the receiving mind? (Ibsen 1964:150)

The idea of connecting the audience or the ‘receiving mind’ in Ibsen’s own words and his plays is not apparently connected with any theatrical perspective, but it can be applied as a point of departure as it has a significant meaning in Bangladesh. The European scholars may not consider Ibsen anymore as a vigorous pioneer of women’s movement as he is considered to be in the other parts of the world where the women issues are still unresolved. Professor Sonia Nishat Amin’s comments can be cited in this regard. She wrote in her paper presented at the International Ibsen conference in 1997 in Dhaka on ‘Gender Issues in Ibsen’s Plays:’

The women’s movement in the West has reached a stage where Nora’s revolt is perhaps passed and Hedda can go out and set up her own world rather than play with pistols. But in a country such as Bangladesh – dowry, deaths, female illiteracy, polygamy, *fatwas* (religious decrees) against woman, the burden of producing male off-spring – are the order of the day. In neighbouring India sati or widow immolation is still practised sporadically. Where then do we stand? We have to listen long and deep to what Nora had to say. Many of our women still do not have the strength or the will to slam the door shut on an exploitative and undignified existence (Amin 1997: 129).

During the 1990s when Ibsen was first included in the syllabi of different universities, and in the same decade when Ibsen’s *A Doll’s House* was first staged in Bangladesh, the first and foremost factor that influenced the choice to be *A Doll’s House*, was the gender issue. The play appeared to be the most discussed among Ibsen’s plays, but there were reasons embedded in the play’s exciting different discussions regarding the role of a woman in a changing society. This idea placed Ibsen instantly among the best European dramatists, and *A Doll’s House* became one of the most discussed plays in Bangladesh by a foreign dramatist. Ibsen’s name is often uttered when the freedom of women or duties of women, or women’s emancipation is discussed.

Ibsen's plays are dominating Bangladeshi theatre for years. Centre for Asian Theatre (CAT) inaugurated its journey with a view to create social awareness and enhance human resources development. Interestingly, its first stage production was *Krishnabibar*, adaptation of Ibsen's *Ghosts*. Some other Ibsen plays are frequently staged in Bangladesh and are vigorously accepted because the people find the reflection of the society in his plays. I have provided a particular social hierarchy as an equivalent factor between the society presented in the plays in Norwegian cultural context and Bangladeshi society in its cultural context that has made it easier for the Bangladeshi audience to find their lives reflected in Ibsen's plays.

Bangladeshi society has a special kind of gender hierarchy that matches with the gender structure presented in Ibsen's plays, and both of these are close to the gender structure theorized by R. W. Connell. The structure displays the division of labour and power that influences and defines the social relationships. The gender relationships are especially important because gender division and gender inequality construct male and female identities that are greatly influencing the modern changing society. Thus modern social and gender theories related with the division of labour, power, and their influences on social behaviour and relationships are also important. Ibsen is very modern in the sense that he has explored these gender relationships and gender structures in the plays. It is the social structure and the distribution of labour and power among men and women in Ibsen's plays that have connection with those in contemporary Bangladesh. Ibsen's play thus helps to understand the situation of men and women relationship from the Bangladeshi point of view.

On the other hand, Ibsen's plays are better understood from the economic point of view. The idea of incorporating Ibsen and gender issue easily gets way if we just concentrate on the micro credit programme of the Grameen Bank, established by the Nobel laureate Dr. Muhammad Yunus. The bank has established an idea of giving loans to women as an effort to fight poverty and gender discrimination simultaneously. We may recall Nora, who could not get loans without the false signature of her father. Though the credit system of the Grameen Bank has nothing to do with Nora's need of money for the treatment of her husband, it reminds that the need for economic freedom was necessary for her. *A Doll's House* acts as a machinery to spread the message that the monetary involvement of women needs recognition. In

a country like Bangladesh where the money lending system of a bank or some non-government organizations have been gender oriented, the idea of theatre and literature to be free of social influences may be a daydream. Theatre is never a separate existence. It is a medium of information, education, and communication. Its existence is related with the socio-political and cultural aspects of a country.

The key concepts in this research work that need some explanation are ‘Intercultural Performance’, ‘Gender’, ‘Gender Hierarchy’, ‘Hegemonic Masculinity’, ‘Emphasized Femininity’.

Key Concepts

Intercultural Performance

Erika Fischer-Lichte’s intercultural performance theory and her comment that the spectators of one culture can receive the objects presented in their own cultural context through subjective experience and accordingly, they can give a new meaning to a particular performance, has been an important point of discussion. Ibsen’s texts are proper examples of her remark. It is widely known that Ibsen denied any connection between his plays and women’s liberal movement, but European female audience appropriated his plays, more specifically, appropriated *A Doll’s House*, as one of the pioneers of Women’s lib. Similarly, contemporary Bangladeshi audience is also appropriating his plays as per their cultural experiences.

In the introduction to *Intercultural Performance Reader* Patrice Pavis quotes Geertz and asks: “How are we to grasp the *intercultural*, when *cultural* itself is already so difficult to imagine in all its senses (Pavis 1996: 2)?” He believes that “*human culture is a system of significations* which allows a society or a group to understand itself in its relationships with the world” (ibid: 2) According to Geertz (1973: 130):

Systems of symbols, created by people, shared, conventional, ordered and obviously learned, furnish them with an intelligible setting for orienting themselves in relation to others or in relation to a living work and to themselves. (Pavis 1996:2)

Erika Fischer-Lichte’s re-interpretation of political theatre and performance in *Theatre, Sacrifice, Ritual: Exploring Forms of Political Theatre* and her underlining

that a “performance is taking place *between* actors and spectators” and that “it is brought forth by both parties” (Fischer-Lichte 2005: 23) confirms Geertz’s view.

Julie Holledge and Joanne Tompkins write in the introduction to their book, *Women’s Intercultural Performance*:

“Interculturalism is the meeting in the moment of performance of two or more cultural traditions, a temporary fusing of styles and/or techniques and/or cultures. [...] It is impossible to provide an elaborate ‘recipe’ of or for interculturalism because the nature of the interrelationship between cultures and between artists depends heavily on the individuals and the individual cultures concerned. It also depends on the encounter, the exchange, any financial contributions, and the complexities of mixing certain cultures. ... Much like a chemical explosion generated by two otherwise non-reactive substances, the nature of interculturalism is such that collaborations may not work despite all best tensions and good planning. (Holledge and Tompkins 2000: 7)

Accordingly, interculturalism is inevitable because “cultures attempt to define themselves by exploring their boundaries: once cultures push that exploration beyond their borders, they intersect and/or clash with other cultures.” (ibid: 7)

They also quote Lampe: “[Interculturalism is characterised by] the tension between common goals and clashing cultures” (Lampe 1993: 153). Ibsen’s plays talk about these common goals between Norwegian and Bangladeshi cultures where ideas related with sex and sexuality are vastly different. Yet, in the present discussion, gender equality has been identified as common goal. ‘Nora’s Sisters’ is a fine example of Norwegian Government’s goal to accomplish a cultural exploration on how ideas regarding gender may work out in different cultures, and Ibsen’s plays are functioning as a measuring tool. I have tried to do something similar: I have tried to find out how this common goal of these two geographically, culturally, and economically different cultures converse at the vantage point of Ibsen’s plays.

I have tried to do something similar: to find out how this common goal of these two geographically, culturally, and economically different cultures converse at the vantage point of Ibsen’s plays. The appropriation of his plays by my culture has been the most important focus, but at the same time, I have tried to see if the ‘source’ culture, namely Norwegian culture or the West, has influenced the ‘target’ culture, namely Bangladeshi culture, as Pavis claims that “the source culture, even when weakened

and modified, continues to influence other cultures and is never completely effaced” (Pavis 1996:11).

My analysis of the plays also encompasses the questions that Richard Schechner asks:

What is the relationship between performance and power? How does performance reproduce, enable, sustain, challenge, subvert, critique, and naturalize ideology? How do performances simultaneously reproduce and resist hegemony? How does performance accommodate and contest domination? (Schechner 2002: 19)

Schechner emphasises the notion of “negotiation” in integrative intercultural performances, which he calls ‘Hybrid performances’ and maintains that “The process is open ended; change is always occurring.” (ibid: 251) I have explored how gender politics has influenced the adaptations and how it has yielded the same reciprocation from the performances.

My principle of interpretation is clearly demonstrated by Rustom Bharucha in his comments to his own production of *Peer Gynt*:

What concerned me were the multiple routes by which a European classic assumes a local significance that would almost seem to have been anticipated in the unrealized possibilities of the original text. (Bharucha 2000:71-72)

I have tried to find out the unrealized possibilities of the original texts that have been further realized in the Bangla productions. Bharucha complicates the discussion by calling “Interculturalism” a kind of “Collisions of Cultures”. He quotes Schechner (1982: 19):

[...] borrowing, stealing and exchanging from other cultures is not necessarily an ‘enriching’ experience for the cultures themselves. Interculturalism can be liberating, but it can also be a ‘continuation of colonialism, a further exploitation of other cultures.’ (Bharucha 1993: 14)

Bharucha questions the legitimacy of the idea of mutual respect and fairness in cultural transactions as “power in the form of money” would play a decisive role in any such exercise. He believes that “the outsiders who give it [money] are the ones who control the ‘cultural exchange’, and however cosmopolitan or altruistic they may be, they are still figures of authority” (Bharucha 1993: 37). This remark is essential here as CAT has received monetary assistance from The Norwegian Government while staging some of the plays. I would analyse whether monetary involvement

influenced the adaptations, or the plays are naturally constructed upon Bangladeshi reality. Intercultural exchanges may have influenced the acceleration of a progress, but gender issue has not necessarily been imported from the West, and is not a tool for further cultural exploitation. The injustice and discrimination that have been practiced through centuries have given birth to social awareness, which has made such intercultural exchanges important.

Gender

Gender is a purely sociological term, which is often mixed up with sex. Sex describes a biological difference i.e. male and female, whereas gender is the effect of socialization i.e. masculine and feminine. Biological account of gender relations has credibility. Desmond Morris (1967, 2004), Lionel Tiger (1999), George Gilder (1986), etc. give account of masculinity and femininity based on natural selection. They project that the biological make-up of our bodies is the basis of social relations of gender. On the other hand, R.W. Connell argues that the innate difference in temperament and ability between men and women is impossible. He claims that even if such differences exist, they are not the basis of major social institutions, and they pale into insignificance beside the common capacities of women and men.

Gayle Rubin also diminishes the biological difference and observes the cultural emphasis on difference between the sexes. She points out that social emphasis on difference is negating natural similarity:

Men and women are, of course, different. But they are not as different as day and night, earth and sky, yin and yang, life and death. In fact, from the standpoint of nature, men and women are closer to each other than either is to anything else – for instance, mountains, kangaroos, or coconut palms. Far from being an expression of natural differences, exclusive gender identity is the suppression of natural similarities. It requires repression: in men, of whatever is the local version of ‘feminine’ traits; in women, of the local definition of masculine traits. (Rubin 1975: 179-80)

Therefore, society elaborates the distinction between the sexes. The biological differences between men and women are amplified by culture. For example, make up, clothing, hair style, accessories, etc. can give a stronger expression of gender. Similarly, different societies have different ways of exaggerating gender difference. Surely, there is importance of the biological difference, but the gender roles are

ascribed to men and women not only depending on the biological differences. There are a good number of social and political reasons. Masculinity and femininity depend on all these.

To understand femininity we have to understand what womanhood is. If we ask what it really means to be a woman as Simone de Beauvoir did in her treatise *The Second Sex*, we must confess that one is not born a woman. The biological factors that mark the characteristics of a woman are not denied but the fact that the social factors really make her a woman is emphasized by this remark. Beauvoir points out that a woman's characteristics are not dictated to her "by her hormones nor predetermined in the structure of the female brain: they are shaped and moulded by her situation" (Beauvoir 1972: 597). Similarly, femininity is not a biological destiny either.

Beauvoir's quest for a woman's identity ends up in the comment that a woman is her physical body; she is her capacity to reproduce; but most importantly she is constructed by her society as the Hegelian 'Other': "She is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her; she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the subject, he is the absolute - she is the Other" (ibid, xxii). Sonia Kruks extends the concept of the Other and calls the situation between men and women as *unequal* (Kruks 1990: 100).

Beauvoir deciphers inadequate education and institution of marriage and motherhood as the most important factors of women's state of immanence. She sees the first as a natural process just as the oppressor always dwarfs the oppressed; so men intentionally deprive women of education. Her objection about the second cause is that women yield mindlessly to marriage and motherhood or they are being forced on to a path they never really choose.

She demonstrates that "man's vocation is to produce, fight, create, progress, to transcend himself toward the totality of the universe and the infinity of the future" (Beauvoir 1972: 448) whereas women are given in marriage, continue the species, and care for what the husband has actively created. Traditional marriage will not allow any woman to transcend with her husband; rather it will shut her up within the walls

of the house. Motherhood is also criticised by her not as a malefactor but as the only factor for her existence.

Rubin, in reference with Marx's definition of a Negro slave, writes,

A woman is a woman. She only becomes a domestic, a wife, a chattel, a playboy bunny, a prostitute, or a human dictaphone in certain relations. Torn from these relationships, she is no more the helpmate of man than gold in itself is money [...] etc. (Rubin 1975: 157)

Ibsen, in many of his plays, either physically or psychologically, has torn women from such relationships. Thus, the female characters have projected a kind of understanding of the feminine as individual self. When these plays have crossed the geographical borders of Norway, they have found new meanings in new cultural contexts. Women have started asking questions regarding their roles assigned by society, and have shown keen interest in human rights of which they are deprived.

Therefore, to understand Ibsen through gender, I have tried primarily to concentrate on the key gender problems in Bangladesh, like the problem of discrepancy in the field of education, work, economy, etc.; and on the problem of representation of women and the status assigned for them by society and religion.

Gender Hierarchy, Hegemonic Masculinity, Emphasized Femininity

There are different arrangements of gender relations in different societies. I have chosen R.W. Connell's structure as the most appropriate one that is exemplified in both Ibsen's plays and in Bangladeshi society. It has worked as a common ground for this discussion.

R. W. Connell, the gender theorist and vigorous academician, examined how men hold social power and create and sustain gender inequality. According to him, everyday interactions and the practices in society produce gender relations; and the actions and interactions of average people are linked to the collective social arrangements in society. These arrangements are continuously reproduced over generations; but these are also subject to change. Connell identifies three aspects of society, which interact to form a society's gender order. These are *Labour*, *Power*, and *Cathexis* (Connell 1987: 96).

Connell uses the term 'gender regime' to refer to the gender relations in smaller settings. A family, a neighbourhood, and a state – all have their own gender regimes. He also uses the term *hegemony*- the social dominance of a certain group that is exercised through a cultural dynamic, which extends into private and social life. The media, education, ideology-all are channels through which this *hegemony* is established. Connell has also proposed a gender hierarchy at the top of which is *hegemonic masculinity*. It is basically associated with heterosexuality and marriage; but it has relation with other agents like authority, paid work, strength, and physical toughness. This is ideal form of masculinity although a few men in society can live up to it. So, the larger number of men tries to gain advantage from the *hegemonic masculinity*'s dominant position in the patriarchal order.

Connell's masculinity theory is also quite appreciable in analysing the gender structures in Ibsen's plays and in Bangladesh. Connell has acknowledged the importance of two substantially different structures. The first is the structure based on the division of labour and the second is based on authority, control and coercion. These two are interrelated, since power, control and authority mostly depend on the division of labour. There is a third structure that is a kind of additive structure based on the patterns of object - choice, desire and desirability, the production of hetero and homosexuality and their relation, trust-distrust, jealousy and solidarity in marriage, emotion involving the rearing of children etc. These structures are important in this discussion as they create a common ground for Ibsen and Bangladesh. I claim that the gender hierarchy and the function of labour, power, and 'cathexis' are common in Ibsen's plays and in Bangladesh, and Ibsen is understood primarily through gender relations.

Before the detailed discussion on Ibsen's plays, it is essential to have an orientation with Connell's gender hierarchies. Connell has integrated the concepts of patriarchy and masculinity into a theory of gender relations. According to him, the dominance of men over women is a central premise around which various types of masculinity and femininity are arranged. The male and female characters of *A Doll's House* and *Ghosts* are placed in Connell's gender hierarchy.

At the top of the hierarchy is *hegemonic masculinity*, which is dominant over all other masculinities and femininity in society. The dominance of this type of masculinity is established by cultural hegemony. Religions, Media, education, ideology, etc. help establish this hegemony. Connell points out that heterosexuality and marriage, authority, paid work, strength and physical toughness etc. are associated with hegemonic masculinity. Connell gives examples of Hollywood stars like Sylvester Stallone, Bruce Willis, Jean-Claude van Damme, and says that only a few men can live up to this ideal form of masculinity. A large number of men who are gaining 'patriarchal dividend' or advantage from *hegemonic masculinity*'s dominant position embody *complicit masculinity*. On the other hand, *homosexual masculinity* ranks at the bottom of the gender hierarchy for men, and is seen as opposite to the 'real man'. There are other subordinated masculinities as well, but *homosexual* is the most important among them. (Giddens 2001)

In Ibsen's plays we do not come across homosexual masculinity, because the contemporary age did not expose that complicated sexual psychology. Similarly, in contemporary Bangladesh, there is no significant sign of gay or lesbian movements. Therefore, this discussion on masculinities will be limited in the first two types.

Connell's gender hierarchy places femininities of all kinds in positions of subordination to hegemonic masculinity. Emphasized femininity is the most important among these and it is a compliment to hegemonic masculinity. It is introduced to uphold the desires and interests of men. The women are believed to have compliance, nurturance and empathy. Young women are sexually receptive, older women are motherly- this is the idea of emphasized femininity. Marilyn Monroe is Connell's example of archetype of emphasized femininity. There are subordinated femininities that reject emphasized femininity, among these feminists, lesbians, spinsters, midwives, witches, prostitutes, manual workers etc. are exemplary. These women are believed to have developed non-subordinated identities and lifestyles, and they are categorised as resistant femininities. In Ibsen's plays we find subordinated femininities of all kinds as he was the one to believe that women would soon find their homes and their places in the world and life inadequate and start a new search for identities.

Connell rejects the view that gender relations are fixed or static. They are open to change and challenge, and people can change their gender orientations as the identities and outlooks can be adjusted. Thus when it is suggested that Western society is undergoing change in gender order, we can say that the social institutions like the family and the state have changed their gender orientation. The legitimacy of men's domination over women is being weakened through various legal, social and psychological factors such as legislation on divorce, domestic violence and rape, economic facilities and rights, married women's rights, gay movements, anti-sexist attitudes, etc.

Hierarchy in Ibsen's plays:

Ibsen's plays have numerous examples of gender hierarchies, and Connell's gender order with masculinities and femininities is undoubtedly present in Ibsen's plays. For example, Nora is a good example of subordinated femininity changing into resistant femininity. *A Doll's House* is Ibsen's most discussed play in the world, and obviously because of gender issues. Nora's devotion for the family, her sacrifice, her secret economic arrangements with Krogstad, etc. give fuel to the thought of the extent of freedom for a woman. Joan Templeton pointed out "Nora's drama can be poetry only if it goes "beyond" feminism" (Templeton 1997: 118). However, it is not easy to leave the thoughts of freedom and equal rights for men and women. That is why Nora is a woman who according to Ibsen's own remark at a banquet, "cannot be herself in contemporary society, it is an exclusively male society with laws drafted by men, and with counsel and judges who judge feminine conduct from the male point of view". The purely hegemonic masculine figure Torvald in *A Doll House* loses his earlier position that is a sign of change in gender order. The consciousness of the female grows and the need for participation in the outer world is emphasized.

Similarly, in *Ghosts* Mrs. Alving represents a shifting femininity, as she transcends from emphasized femininity to resistant femininity. On the other hand, Pastor Manders is a good example of hegemonic masculinity, who has social recognition and is strengthened by religion and conventions. His strict principles, his religious fervour, denial of female freedom – everything indicates at his autocratic male power in a patriarchal social order. *Ghosts* as a play directly comments on the social order, the idea of duty of a woman, customs of marriage, function of economic condition,

participation of women in work etc. that are very much relevant in contemporary Bangladeshi society. Ibsen's characters in *Ghosts* and *A Doll's House* can be transformed in Connell's gender hierarchy as:

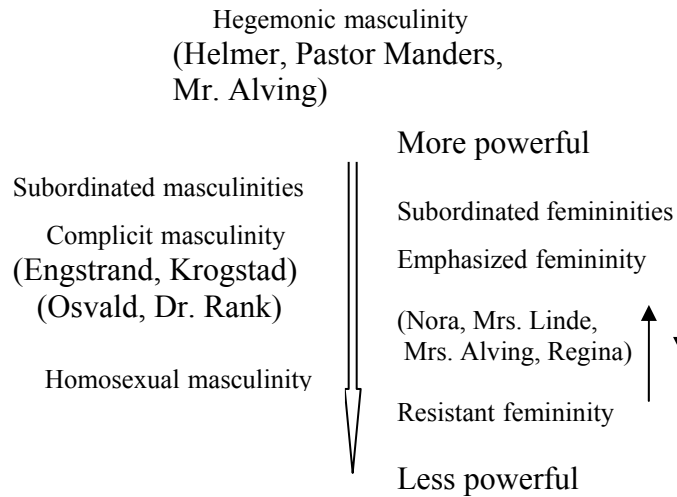


Figure: Ibsen's characters in Connell's gender hierarchy

Kristine Linde and Regina complicate the gender discussion as they are placed as working women in the social outset. Yet, I think that they are also representing the shifting femininity. They start with a resistant mode and deny the necessity of relationships that usually place women as domesticated, but gradually they turn to those relationships because of pressure from the surroundings. Therefore, the major female characters except the maids and nannies in the plays interchange their positions between emphasized and resistant femininities in Connell's gender hierarchy.

It is not possible, neither it is necessary to discuss all the plays by Ibsen to be discussed in assessing his importance in Bangladesh. As my scheme is to see Ibsen through the lens of gender relations and the relevance with Bangladeshi gender order, I would consider these two plays and their respective Bangla adaptations by CAT to show the influence of gender awareness on them.

What is the gender situation in Bangladesh?

Bangladesh is country with several socio-political problems. Every year the country receives foreign aid for development, but even after that, the progress is not up to the expectation. One of the main drawbacks is the lack of utilization of the huge

manpower, to be more specific, womanpower. The discrimination between the sexes frequently hinders the scope for learning, employment and freedom of women.

Bangladeshi society displays a strong hegemony of masculine power, as the leaders of all social units are usually males. In a family, the father is the leading member; in the religious institutions, the leaders are always the males; in the Government and Non-Government organisations, the majority employees are the males; in education sector, the men are leading though the situation is changing gradually, and the large female populace are depending on the males. The roles ascribed to women in Bangladesh are traditionally the roles of docile daughters, compliant wives and dependant mothers.

Three major fields are important in the gender discussions, which are female education, female participation in the economic system, and the factors that work against the enlightenment of women. Girls' education rate is gradually increasing and although the number of girls in the university or tertiary institutions, awareness about women's higher studies has been created. On the other hand, the involvement of women as workers in the labour force in the recent years is remarkable. In short, there has been a kind of renaissance for the women of post-independence Bangladesh. The opposing forces that have functioned as apparatus for the patriarchy have always been active, and the new ideas related with women's enlightenment has always fought with those. Thus, the present day Bangladesh has an understanding of women's emancipation and conflict of antagonistic forces related closely with this emancipation.

In the recent years, the situation has changed largely. Social awareness has been visible in the Government's changed outlook about female education and employment. There are numerous examples for the Government's policy for gender mainstreaming and gender equality with the support of UNICEF or other International organisations that include the strategies and methodical approaches to gender. Women in Development (WID) approach emerged in the 1970s with the objective of devising policies and actions to integrate women into development. It included strategies like projects that included only women, focusing on training of women, and women's productive work such as credit and income-generation. But WID failed to address the systematic causes of gender inequality, mainly because WID treated women as

passive recipients of development and women's concerns were viewed in isolation as a separate issue than men's. Then a new approach developed in the 1980s as a response to the perceived failure of WID approach. The objective of the new project was to remove disparities in social, economic and political equality between women and men as it was a pre-condition for achieving people-centred development. Unlike the WID approach, GAD was concerned with the power relations between men and women and challenged unequal decision-making. It addressed the underlying causes of gender inequality, explored the possibilities of mainstreaming gender into planning, and focused on the actions that are necessary to ensure equal outcomes. The GAD approach was a challenge to the assumption that men and male situation was a norm, and the emphasis was on women's human rights. Later on, Millennium Development Goals that started in the 1990s also included gender equality among the time-bound targets that should be achieved by 2015. Every year Bangladesh celebrates the International Women's Day on March 8 as a part of the global celebration for the economic, political and social achievements of women. Since 1998, Bangladesh observes Meena Day on September 24 to celebrate the famous animated girl character that stands for child rights and gender equality.

Henrik Ibsen and his nineteenth century ideas apparently do not have orientation and relation with the women's movement in Bangladesh. This is why Connell's gender theory and gender hierarchy can be a common platform for both Ibsen's plays and present day Bangladesh and can help understand why and how Ibsen's plays match with Bangladeshi society. Surprisingly, the dynamic gender hierarchy and the interaction of labour, power, and relationships are evident in his plays. He has elaborately drawn a picture of *hegemonic masculinity* in his plays where the female must be subordinated to it, and he has questioned the validity of ethical values that functioned against progress. There lies the greatness of a true artist. He has proved that one is not born a woman. Social agencies are mainly responsible for the maintenance of gender discrimination and male dominance. He is able to analyse the social structure of the patriarchy and foresee the change in the hierarchy that is inevitable because of the shift in the order of the agents that work within it. The plays under discussion have these gender regimes and display the function of *labour*, *power*, and *cathexis*.

Methodology and design

I have followed three major methodological steps in my research:

i) In Chapter 2, I have tried to develop an idea about the cultural mindset of the audience. More specifically, I have tried to explore the ‘receiving mind’ in Ibsen’s word that has been rooted to the country’s socio-political history. Then I have presented the hierarchical relationship between Ibsen’s characters in the plays to search for the meeting points between Ibsen and Bangladeshi society exploring the texts of *Ghosts* and *A Doll’s House*.

ii) The discussions of the performances of *Ghosts* and *A Doll’s House* in Chapter 3 and 4 are based on the methodological condition that a performance is a relation or an event, taking place *between* actors and spectators. This relation is brought forth by both parties and is an immediate, dynamic and unpredictable expression of what is important in the local culture, based on local conditions – and the local situation. Even when a production is staged in a different time and in a different culture, the audience will immediately recognize the similarities with their own culture and situation as if it was “always already” (Nygaard 2007) there. I see the staging of *Ghosts* and *A Doll’s House* as events in a broader sense in which the actors and audience interacted in a shared moment of their lives and deduced their meanings. That interaction and simultaneously the consequential deduction of their meaning were influenced by the contemporary gender situation as an invaluable contributing factor that helped the audience to appropriate Ibsen plays and being appropriated by them as such. I, as a spectator, have emphasized on my own judgement on the performances.

I have examined the locally adapted versions of the same plays to discuss how the audience’s culture and society have modified and influenced the adaptations in Bangladesh. The local audience have appropriated the plays in their own way and the plays are ascribed new turnings because of them. Through the adaptations, I have also discussed how the interest in gender relationship and awareness of women’s equality and freedom has influenced the acceptance and importance of Ibsen in Bangladesh.

iii) I have tried to investigate how far money has played a role in the reception of Ibsen in Bangladesh, as money has a major part in the discussion regarding intercultural performances.

Important Sources:

I have been the most important living source for my discussion. I have placed myself as the strongest representative of the ‘target’ culture that is one vital part of the whole process of reception. My social background has provided me with the facilities I need for such a position. I, as a young woman from Bangladesh, have been experiencing to which end the discussions on Ibsen are getting. In the 90s, I was a student of English Literature and read Ibsen for the first time, and watched one of the amateur student productions of *A Doll’s House*. Since the first experience, I have been witnessing how the extraordinary thrust on gender issues is consigned on *A Doll’s House*, and how this play gets new meaning in the everyday lives of women like me. I inherited the legacy and while I discuss Ibsen in a class with my students (I am teaching at a public university), I discuss the women issues at the outset. I acknowledge that my judgement is bound to be biased, but there is no place for objectivity in reception either.

My most important sources for the presentation and discussion of the performances are the electronic versions of the performances of *Ghosts* and *A Doll’s House* in Bangla; the DVDs were collected from Centre for Asian Theatre (CAT). I have translated some dialogues for citation instead of going back to the original English translations. However, I believe that the position of me is more or less of an audience although I have watched the plays in DVD versions, which is rather indirect and insufficient to deduce the full meaning. Still, I strongly depended on my own view as I have been in a rather advantageous position as a Bangladeshi and a woman. To elude my prejudice, which is in a way impossible, I have tried to see through the existing materials on the events like newspaper reviews and programme notes. The public opinion of the audience is also considered, and Survey Reports published by CAT has been a support for this. I have also included photographs, which evidently show the actors’ position on the stage and tried to interpret the ‘performativity of sex’ through the presentation of their bodies, etc.

The book materials used in the discussion in Chapter 2 are the English texts of Ibsen's plays translated by different translators. In some cases, the Norwegian texts of Ibsen's plays are also used for better understanding. The performance texts are also taken into consideration. The texts of Fischer-Lichte, Pavis, Schechner, Bharucha, etc. are also important sources.

To go more into theatre historiography, I tried to get information on other groups' productions of the same plays. *Ghosts* was not staged in Bangladesh before CAT's *Krishnabibar*, but as I have mentioned earlier, *Putul Khela* in Mitra's script based on *A Doll's House* was staged by the theatre group 'Kanthasheelan' that performed Ibsen in Bangladesh for the first time in 1993. There were about twenty-four shows of that production and it was applauded immensely. I could get hold of some newspaper reviews on the performances that have helped to understand how it was received in that decade. The artistic director, Khaled Khan, has luckily been available for an interview, and his comments are cited. The director of the two Ibsen plays under discussion, Kamaluddin Nilu, who was CAT's executive director until 2006, and has been based in the Centre for Ibsen Studies since a long time, has also been interviewed. He has been an important source for information and motivation.

Among others, Professor Julie Holledge, Professor Krishna Sen, Selina Hossain (a prominent female novelist in Bangladesh), Professor Shafi Ahmed, Professor Kajal Bandyopadhyay, Professor Sonia Nishat Amin (who is simultaneously a gender activist), Sabrina Sultana (the actress of CAT who has been acting in major female roles in Ibsen plays), other minor artists who have simultaneously been taking part on the stage and are involved in off-stage technical matters, have been my co-operating partners in this journey. I have analysed their comments, and have tried to diagnose their viewpoints in their own sexual status in Bangladesh. I have found out that they have expressed the views sometimes influenced by their own gender roles and positions.

Chapter 2: Background

The meeting points for Ibsen and Bangladeshi society

It is not possible to write intelligently about “Ibsen’s idea of Women” or “Woman’s place in Ibsen’s Ideological Landscape.” Long before the post-Freudians, Ibsen questioned the existence of a “female nature,” critically examining the exclusiveness of the categories “masculine” and “feminine” both within people and within systems. Ibsen’s refusal of Woman allowed him to discover the socialization of sexual identity we now call “gender” and to investigate women as full moral beings struggling against the cultural norms that define and limit them. Taken as whole, his plays constitute a remarkable literary contribution to feminist thought, whose central tenet historian Joan Scott defines as “the refusal of the hierarchical construction of the relationship between male and female in its specific contexts and an attempt to reverse or displace its operations.” (Templeton 1997: xvi)

Joan Templeton’s remark is highly relevant to this discussion of Ibsen and gender structures. Louie Bennett also claimed about Ibsen that

More than any other modern writer he has proved himself a prophet and an apostle of the cause of woman; no other modern writer has shown more sympathetic comprehension of her nature and its latent powers.
(Bennett 1910: 278)

Sally Ledger quotes Bennett just to go a little further; she claims that Ibsen invented the ‘New Woman’ in England as his challenging female character roles were immensely influential in the foundation of the identity of the New Woman in 1890s London.

From the moment that his plays began to be translated and performed in Western Europe in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, he began to receive remarkable accolades for his dramatic representation of women and womanhood. (Ledger 2001: 79)

Alisa Solomon denounces some resentful comments by critics such as Robert Brustein’s comment that “Ibsen has been expropriated by the woman’s movement”, saying that

For it is to some extent Ibsen’s plays with female protagonists are feminist- at least at the level of the stories they tell- it’s because they are realistic. They refer to a recognizable world in which women’s lives are confined, constrained, controlled. While they don’t make an agit-prop argument for changing that world, they evoke it critically, revealing its consequences. That is, they play on a feminist field, sexist bourgeois values providing the fateful background of Ibsen’s mythic work. (Solomon 1997: 49-50)

Erika Fischer-Lichte's comment (2008a: 96) is enlightening the field. In the process of modernisation, the need to free women from the shackles of society and their participation in productive activities was felt, and thus Ibsen became very important. The other factors like corruption in the social authorities or industrial pollution as a result of modernisation etc. have also been overtly discussed in relation with him, but women issues were most vigorously taken up everywhere in the world.

The power structures in *A Doll's House* and *Ghosts* that have made the plays familiar and easy to understand from a gender based socio-political perspective

The gender structures in *Ghosts* and *Krishnabibar* are basically the same; the head of the families and the institutions are males, the less potential males are living under the hegemonic influence of such important males.

In *Ghosts* the male who secures the hegemonic position is Captain Alving, although the priority seems to be given to Pastor Manders. The position of a father is very important in the play, which has so far been escaped the scholarly eyes. In the opening act Engstrand starts the discussion on fatherhood. "You trying to cross your own father, you slut?" (Ibsen 1978: 205) this is how he addresses Regina, and tries to find his space as father: "I am your father, you know. I can prove it in the parish register." (ibid: 209)

The position of father has been important in all ages, and the position of a priest is also related with fatherhood in Christianity. The pastor's entry is a harbinger of hope for the knave Engstrand as he believes that the pastor will tell Regina what a child owes her father. The pastor actually tells more than that: he appeals Regina to go with her father as the man needs her and it is a daughter's duty to love and obey her father. He also touches the title of 'Court Chamberlain' and says that he prefers 'Captain' instead of that as it sounds more ostentatious (ibid: 215). He is well aware of his own position too. He tells Mrs. Alving that if they insure the orphanage, he will be the one to be the subject of criticism. He also prohibits any scope for dissension in the community. This is how he pushes the decision although he says to her "As you wish. (jotting a note.) No insurance." (ibid: 218) Captain Alving's death has given him the power he enjoys with his property, and he is controlling everything. When he feels

necessary, he becomes the priest who has the power of dictating people, as we find him in the following speech:

You're a woman much to be pitied, Mrs. Alving. Now I must talk seriously with you. It's no longer as your business adviser, nor as your and your husband's childhood friend, that I am standing before you now – but as your priest, exactly as I once did at the most bewildered hour of your life. (ibid: 225)

His rebuffs are harsh and straight forward as he reminds Mrs. Alving of her leaving the house after one year of marriage. His verdict becomes stronger in the mentioning of her miserable conjugality with him:

But this is the very essence of the rebellious spirit, to crave happiness here in this life. What right have we human beings to happiness? No, we must do our duty, Mrs. Alving! And your duty was to stand by that man you once had chosen, and to whom you were joined by a sacred bond. (ibid: 225)

He also denies her right to judge her husband's action:

But a wife isn't required to be her husband's judge. It was your proper role to bear with a humble heart that cross that a higher will saw fit to lay upon you. But instead, you rebelliously cast away the cross, left the grooping soul you should have aided, went off and risked your good name and reputation and – nearly ruined other reputations in the bargain. (ibid: 226)

He accuses her of evading the duty of a mother and being so much irresponsible as to send away the son. The same is happening to women in Bangladesh; they have to abide by the hegemonic father figure, and many a times they confront the priest's verdicts. To make the women situation more clear regarding the duties and rebellious spirit we can turn back to the patriarchal institution that has given rise to many questions.

Priests like Pastor Manders have a large share of power in Bangladeshi social structure. Government officials are not powerless, but the muslim priests have a special hegemonic position in the power structure as they are believed to have the knowledge of interpreting the holy books for the illiterate mass. Thus, the top position in the gender hierarchy is usurped by them, and all the other males enjoy the hegemonic position of these priests. As we find in the play, Engstrand enjoys the influential support of Pastor Manders. There are mention of some other influential people in the original play who may have some objection if the orphanage is insured. Similarly, in the adaptation there are several others specified as government officials, politicians, captains of ships, so on and so forth whom Rozina calls 'boats that have

lost their sails' (from the adapted bangla play, translated by me). These others are also important in the gender hierarchy, they are all males. It is understood that they are either equal or almost equal to Pastor Manders' position, and the same is evident in the adaptation. Therefore, I have chosen for the original play, Captain Alving and Pastor Manders and for the adaptation, Moulana Mannaf as the hegemonic masculine figures. They create their own space through the patriarchy's emphasis on father figure, both biological and spiritual.

These hegemonic figures act as the shelter for the complicit masculinities like Engstrand and Osvald, in the adaptation, Entaz and Osman respectively. Culturally, Bangladesh has never been the place for gay and lesbian movements. Therefore, as in the original, there is no space for homosexuals.

Et Dukkehjem or *A Doll's House*, on the other hand, is the most discussed play by Ibsen, and is probably the reason for Ibsen's worldwide popularity and criticism. The play's title evokes suspicion, because the little plaything that looks like a miniature house is called 'doll house,' not 'doll's house.' Even if the doll is considered as subject, it has to be noted that an inanimate object like a doll cannot and do not possess anything. Many of the English versions of 'Et Dukkehjem' are 'A Doll House.' The play's title means a lot and works out the gender pattern in the beginning. It involves twofold meaning of the idea of doll; either the play is about a house where human beings, particularly one human being acts and is treated like a doll; or the play literally presents a dollhouse. *Et Dukkehjem* has done both, the play's very first act refers to a gift bought by Nora for her daughter which is a 'doll house'; and surprisingly it is acknowledged that it is very fragile. On the other hand, Nora herself is treated like a doll, and consequently she plays her doll part in conjugality. Nora's house proves to be a 'doll house' at the end when relationships break down.

The play betrays a power structure that is gender based. As in any society, the smallest unit is the family, and the structure, starting from there, is prevailing everywhere in the society. Directly or indirectly, the readers get to know four families: Nora's own family where her father was the head, Helmer-Nora's family where he is the authority, Krogstad's family where his is the burden of maintenance,

and lastly Mrs. Linde's family with mother and siblings. How do the family structures resemble Connell's gender structure? In all these cases except one, the structure presents hegemonic masculinity.

Nora's father was the highest authority, as there is no mention of her mother. It is in a sense, death of the 'unnecessary woman'. If we consider her absence as her death, surprisingly we find that she is never revived through memories or references. The woman is unwanted. On the other hand, Nora's father is mentioned frequently, and has been treated with both criticism and praise. He was the authority in his household, as Nora mentions in the last act that she never had free will under his guidance.

Nora: ...When I lived at home with Papa, he told me all his options, so I had the same ones too; or if they were different I hid them, since he wouldn't have care for that. He used to call me his doll child, and he played with me the way I played with my dolls. (Ibsen 1978: 191)

Nora's femininity was well established, as she believed that she was happy in that way, and her wish to inherit more of her father's qualities expresses a kind of fascination emphasized femininity holds for hegemonic masculinity.

The same need for freedom existed in her marriage.

Nora: ...You arranged everything to your own taste, and so I got the same taste as you – or pretended to; I can't remember. I guess a little of both, first one, then the other. (ibid: 191)

From the very beginning, Nora is playing the role of a wife who is essentially submissive but attractively tricky. She is given as much space as the society allows her, and she must act within that. Nora's place in the beginning of the play is of emphasized femininity. She has done everything to satisfy the hegemonic male authority. She has been satisfied in being so until she is forced to give up the position. The force also comes from a male, namely Krogstad, in the form of external threat. Nora's actions are necessarily coded and she becomes the spokesperson of a woman's trapped situation and necessary transformation.

On the other hand, Kristine Linde's family represents a matriarchal prototype that has become extinct. Krogstad's family is indicative of a womanless family where the man is all-powerful. The unity of Krogstad and Kristine may have some hint at the

forthcoming future where both man and woman can take decisions, or can rule over one another.

According to Selina Hossain (personal correspondence, 26.6.2008) and Sonia Nishat Amin (personal correspondence, 7.7.2008), Nora is nothing but a prototype of a Bangladeshi woman whose life is guided by the symbolic order of the society. The play's adaptation by Kamaluddin Nilu is more directly gendered as it starts with a song that gives the message of gender conflict that arises from inequality of freedom:

Men and women are playing the role of opposite parties
Who will win in this game of rights?
Win or defeat in this question of freedom. (My translation)

While Ibsen was included in the syllabi of public universities, as Professor Shafi Ahmed (personal correspondence, 11.7.2008) has declared, the choice of its being *A Doll's House* was motivated by its worldwide popularity and a will to make the female students particularly aware of the gender situation. In some particular years, *An Enemy of the People* brought some changes in the syllabi of a few universities, which was also motivated by contemporary political situation. However, in almost all the public universities, the choice is still *A Doll's House*.

Similarly, the adaptation is motivated by gender thoughts as the play's director Kamaluddin Nilu (personal correspondence, 22.10. 2008) acknowledges. The public opinion as surveyed by CAT, is the same. *Ghosts* is the other play by Ibsen that was a timely choice in the social context when gender was at the centre of debate and unrest.

The original play has equal appeal as it has much similarity with Bangladeshi life in regards of gender structure. In the opening act of *Ghosts* Engstrand says:

Jeez, that was something she [Regina's mother] never could forget – that the captain was made a chamberlain while she was in service there. (Ibsen 1978: 205)

The sudden shift of conversation to masculine power through social rank is in the emphasis of Captain Alving's being a chamberlain. Etymologically and historically, a Chamberlain is an officer charged with the superintendence of domestic affairs in Norway and other European countries. A royal chamberlain is a court official whose

function is in general to attend on the person of the sovereign and to regulate the etiquette of the palace. On the other hand, chamberlain is an unfamiliar position in Bangladesh. The change brought into the Bangla adaptation of *Ghosts* by CAT is marked in the conversation between Jacob Engstrand and his daughter Regina who are respectively Entaz and Rozina in the Bangla play. The emphasis in the adaptation is on Maulana Mannaf (the Bangladeshi counterpart of Pastor Manders), and on his liking and disliking. In the Bangla play, Entaz refers to Maulana Mannaf's scope of being dissatisfied if he sees Rozina misbehaving with her father:

Entaz: ... by the way, Maulana Mannaf is supposed to arrive here today.

Regina: yes.

Entaz: ... if he sees that I am getting poor attention from you, he will be displeased, you see. (My translation)

A chamberlain's position has importance in Norway that loses meaning with the Bangladeshi audience. That is why the balance of power has been shifted and the emphasis is on the 'moulana' who is a Muslim priest.

Because of the socio-political background of the country's women movements, the two plays, as soon as they were staged, caught the attention of critics and audience, and at once it was believed that they had connection with gender conflicts and gender discussion. Therefore, before any detailed discussion on the two adaptations, it would not be irrelevant to look into the gender situation of present day Bangladesh and how gender has developed in its socio-political atmosphere through ages. Bangladeshi gender culture has been the consequence of cross currents that flowed into the larger body of patriarchy from different sources. Religion and state politics are the main sources as has been identified here.

Women in Bangladesh are subordinated within the hierarchical system of gender relations, as Johnson (2004: 21) writes

Hierarchy is a crucial concept in social relations in Bangladeshi society. An individual's access to power and material resources is largely determined by three attributes. Class, age and gender. Although there is room for individual variation, generally, rich supersedes poor, age supersedes youth, and male supersedes female. (Naz 2006: 11)

Social power and control over their own lives are what they aspire to attain, but they are constantly denied of even the granted rights to which they are entitled. The

material base of patriarchy is men's control of property, income, and women's labour. With the growth of women's studies, more and more authors have identified labour, power and sexuality as the main structural elements shaping the relationship between gender and power (Connell 1987).

Women's position in the socio-political context of Indian Sub-continent that has made the premeditated reciprocation to the plays' gender debates possible

Catherine Thompson writes that women in Bangladesh are perceived to be degraded to the position of second-class citizens because of their economic, social, political and legal bondages in relation to gender. (Thompson 1981: 39) Bangladesh is part of patriarchy where men and women are put into different classes segregated by religion. Formerly East Bengal and the East Pakistan, Bangladesh shares two of the oldest and richest cultural traditions of the world. On the one hand, it roots back to ancient Indic civilization and on the other hand to Islamic culture (Monsoor 1999: 27). The linguistic and cultural foundation of Bangla language and Bengali identity in Sanskrit and Hinduism has given the Bangladeshi people a separate identity than the other Muslims in the world. Bangladeshi Muslims adhere simultaneously to the principles of Islam and to the Bengali culture. On the other hand, Islam has absorbed beliefs and practices akin to Hinduism in India while it entered into the subcontinent.

In ancient India, women occupied a very important position, in fact a superior position to, men. It is a culture whose only words for strength and power are feminine - "Shakti" means "power" and "strength." All male power comes from the feminine. Literary evidence suggests that kings and towns were destroyed because a single woman was wronged by the state. For example, Valmiki's *Ramayana* teaches us that Ravana and his entire clan were wiped out because he abducted Sita. *Ramayana* is also a good example of the female sacrifice in the name of 'dharma' or religion. Sita has to go through fire to prove that she was a 'sati,' not touched by Ravana. Then out of shame she goes down the earth voluntarily to prove her dignity. Veda Vyasa's *Mahabharatha* teaches us that all the Kauravas were killed because they humiliated Draupadi in public.

Despite these, one has to acknowledge that Hinduism enforces patriarchy and subsidizes women's status in many ways. The *Bhagavad-Gita* recognizes the wisdom of guarding women (and children) from their evil tendencies.

As children are very prone to be misled, women are similarly very prone to degradation. Therefore, both children and women require protection by the elder members of the family. By being engaged in various religious practices, women will not be misled into adultery. (Prabhupada 1986: 66-67)

Ancient Hindu literature has expressed paradoxical views on the role and position of women. The Laws of *Manu* is a good example. It says in chapter 3, law 56: "Where women are revered, there the gods rejoice; but where they are not, no rite bears any fruit" (Olivelle 2005: 111). On the other hand, it also asserts the critical need to protect the women, as in chapter 9 the laws 1-3 say: "Day and night men should keep their women from acting independently; for attached as they are to sensual pleasures, men should keep them under their control. Her father guards her in her childhood, her husband guards her in her youth, and her sons guard her in her old age; a woman is not qualified to act independently" (Olivelle 2005: 190).

During and following the epic period, the caste system (an ancient social philosophy) became rigid, which caused conflict within the society. The women often became the victims of this internal social conflict as well as the violence caused by the foreign invaders. The protection of women thus became a pressing issue for the society and the men had to shoulder this responsibility. Thus, the husband became the sole protector (like god) of his wife. This led to a social structure in which a wife was expected to cling to her husband for protection--in other words, worship him. This is why *Ramayana* says that the highest dharma of the woman is to worship her husband.

I would quote the following from Manu's code of law to show how they reflect Pastor Manders's verdict on Mrs. Alving's wish to leave her husband in *Ghosts*:

She must never want to separate herself from her father, husband, or sons; for by separating herself from them, a woman brings disgrace on both families. (Chapter 5, law 149 as in Olivelle 2005: 146)

Manu's law also reflects something, which is applicable for both Nora and Mrs. Alving:

She should always be cheerful, and clever at housework, careful in keeping the utensils clean, and frugal in her expenditures. The man to whom her father or, with her father's consent, her brother gives her away – she should obey him when he is alive and not be unfaithful to him when he is dead. (Chapter 5, law 151 as in *ibid*: 146)

Eventually the reason of his refusal to accept her when she seeks refuge in him is identified in the same book:

When a woman abandons her own husband of lower rank and unites with a man of higher rank, she only brings disgrace upon herself in the world and is called “a woman who has had a man before.” By being unfaithful to her husband, a woman becomes disgraced in the world, takes birth in a jackal's womb, and is afflicted with evil diseases. (Chapter 5, law 163-164, as in *ibid*: 147)

Mrs. Alving's life is a reflection of these Hindu women who are unable to take decisions on their own; cannot have any right to leave husbands, and cannot think about getting any relief from pain in the world. Mrs. Alving could not think about another man and leave her lustful husband because of the religious and social restrictions, and her situation must remind of this teaching of Hinduism if she is put in an Indian cultural context of which Bangladesh is a part. Nora also becomes a symbol of rebellion and vice according to these teachings. She acts freely, does not have saving habits, leaves her husband, and is sure to reborn in the womb of a jackal. As described in the above quote, women are not fit for independence and must worship their husbands as gods; these are the duties required of virtuous Hindu women.

Hinduism in India was crueller than Pastor Manders' accusations. ‘Sati’ must be mentioned in this regard, which was an 18th century tradition among the Hindus to burn or cremate the widows with their husbands' corpses. This was the cruellest sign of degeneration in the Indian subcontinent. The majority of the widows were killed in the name of religion in that period, and colonial influence was necessary to stop it.

It is true that some of the ancient scriptures were very partial to women, but in ancient India, there was hardly any organized political or religious machinery to implement the religious laws universally. Religion was, as it is now, mostly a matter of personal choice. The *Smritis* mentioned here or the law books of Hinduism had little impact on the day-to-day lives of the vast majority of the people. This dichotomy towards

women is always present in patriarchal religions. The interpreters of the religious principles are largely mature men who exert that women must be grateful to their husbands who are their masters. Mahatma Gandhi felt an urgent need to reconcile these views with the principles of democracy. He uttered: "To call women the weaker sex is libel; it is man's injustice to women," and , "The wife is not the husband's bond-slave but his companion and his help-mate and an equal partner in all his joys and sorrows---as free as the husband to choose her own path." (These quotes are actually displayed on the walls of Gandhi Museum in Mumbai, India.) After all these years, patriarchy is very much there and a woman defying her husband of course does ring bells, as Professor Krishna Sen (personal correspondence, 21.8.2008) has exemplified. She believes that although the wife's leaving the house rang more bells in the 1950s and 60s, it still happens in India. There are cases of husband's colluding in dowry murder. Her view is that Norwegian patriarchy, in the play, insisted that the wife be treated properly (she emphasized on Helmer's concern about Nora's modest clothing), whereas Indian patriarchy is not concerned about it at all. At another level, even in a conservative patriarchal society some new generation young men are supportive of their wives. It may no longer be just the husband-wife relationship of the play but the whole structure of the society that has some relevance.

Bangladeshi tradition is far more complicated than the teachings and laws of Hinduism as it has multiple influences: influence of Islam and the donor agencies. The emergence of Islam in the region is concurrent with the Turko-Muslim invasion of medieval India (which includes large parts of present day Pakistan and the Republic of India), where these rulers took over the administration of large parts of India. Since its introduction into India, Islam has made significant religious, artistic, philosophical, cultural, social and political influences to Indian history. It may even go further back to the 7th or 8th centuries when the Arab traders came to South East Asia. But the time is not important for this discussion; what count are the customs introduced by Islam that have brought some modifications in the women's status.

The *Quran* is gender neutral to some extent regarding religious practices, moral behaviour, and rewards and punishments. Women's duties do not include a wife's total submission to the husband, but in Bangladesh this has become a 'hocus-pocus' mixed with the idea of a husband's being a deity whom a wife must worship. There is

a verse where to emphasize a child's duty towards the mother it is mentioned that the heaven of a child lays in the feet of its mother, but in Bangladesh the idiomatic use of it has been changed into a husband's feet where lays the wife's heaven. The reward for good earthly deeds is a place of abundance, namely, the Garden of Eden, where there is entry for women and in some cases, the punishments are also offered in equal terms.

Where lays the discrimination then? If we consider the offerings for worldly life, the matters of ownership of properties and positions, or matters of rewards and punishments and duties in life, there are discriminative terms for men and women. The following verse of the *Quran* shows that Islam has given men and women separate positions and identities:

Men are appointed guardians over women, because of that in respect of which Allah has made some of them excel others, and because the men spend of their wealth. So virtuous women are obedient and safeguard, with Allah's help, matters the knowledge of which is shared by them with their husbands. Admonish those of them on whose part you apprehend disobedience, and leave them alone in their beds and chastise them. Then if they obey you, seek no pretext against them. Surely Allah is High, Great (Surah 4, Verse 35 as in Khan 1971: 78)

Still, the *Quran* is not as harsh as the *Smritis*, and keeps a space for women's will:

O ye who believe, it is not lawful for you to inherit from women against their will, nor should you hold them back wrongfully that you may have take away from them part of that which you may have given them; their being confined to their houses for unbecoming conduct is a matter apart. Consort with them in kindness. If you dislike them, it may be that you dislike something in which Allah has placed much good. (Surah 4, Verse 20 as in ibid: 76)

I would quote some other verses from the *Quran* that will be relevant with the discussion on *Ghosts*, especially those that are related with adultery, polygamy, divorce, property rights, etc.

Another verse expatiates on men's rights on their divorced wives and the children of them they bear:

Divorced women shall wait, concerning themselves, for the space of three courses. It is not lawful for them to conceal what Allah may have created in their wombs, if they believe in Allah and the Last day. If their husbands should desire reconciliation during this period, they would have the stronger right to

the continuation of the marriage than that it should be irrevocably dissolved. In such case the wives have rights corresponding to those which the husbands have, in equitable reciprocity, though, in certain situations men would have the final word and would thus enjoy a preference. Allah is Mighty, Wise. (Surah 2, verse 229 as in *ibid*: 35-36)

As in Hinduism, in Islam women are told to be modest and cautious for the preservation of chastity, the verses that have evoked most gender controversies are those related with ‘purdah’ or the covering for Muslim women. For example, in Surah 24, Verse 31-32:

Direct the believing women to restrain their looks and to guard their senses and not to disclose any part of their beauty or their embellishments, save that which is apparent thereof. They should draw their head-coverings across their bosoms; and should not disclose any part of their beauty or their embellishments save to their husbands or to their fathers, or the fathers of their husbands or their sons or the sons of their husbands, or their brothers, or the sons of their brothers, or the sons of their sisters, or gentlewomen, or those under their control, or such attendants who have no desire for women, or such children who have no knowledge of the relationship between the sexes; nor should they strike their feet on the ground in such a manner as to disclose their ornaments which they ought not to disclose. (*ibid*: 341-342)

Later interpretations and elaboration of this verse directed more towards restricting women’s mobility and self-determination. The extreme form of seclusion in the name of ‘purdah’ meant women’s separate living quarters in the house, women’s invisibility in the public spaces; women could travel in covered transport and *burqa* (cloak or *hijab*). These arrangements involved expenses that only the well heeled could afford

The *Quran* has suggested about adultery and its punishments about women, in Surah 4, Verse 19:

Those of your women who commit indecency – call four witnesses against them, and if they testify – confine to (their) houses until death complete their term (of life) or Allah appoint for them a way (of dealing with them). (Bell 1960: 70-71)

Adultery must be proved before punishment is executed, and there are punishments for the wicked transgressors that launch a charge against chaste women without producing witnesses. Yet, punishment for adultery takes new form in the more general indictments, in those that are for both men and women, as in Surah 24, Verse 2:

The fornicatress and the fornicator – scourge each of them with a hundred stripes; let no pity affect you in regard to them in the religion of Allah, if ye have come to believe Allah and the Last Day; and let witness their punishment a party of the Believers. (Bell 1960: 336)

Naturally, like the verses in Hindu religious literatures, males often interpret the verses of the *Quran*, and they take them to the extremes of misinterpretation in oppressive terms. History is evident of the cruelty and inhuman punishment accorded to women in Bangladesh in the name of Islamic ‘fatwa’.

Maleka Begum writes in the preface of her book *Ami Naree: Tinshow Bachharer Bangali Nareer Itihash* (I am a Woman: Three Hundred Years’ History of Bengali Women, my translation):

Through ages, constraint, aristocracy, child marriage, polygamy, slavery, notion of chastity, mal education – all these secluded women. The situation did not change in the eighteenth century. Few changes occurred during the nineteenth century. Revolutions, reactions, etc. started taking place. (Begum 2004: xv)

Taslina Mansoor (1999) writes elaborately on the patriarchal systems in Bangladesh. She points out that the systems are commonly identified as patrilineal descent and patrilocal residence. A boy is the perpetuator of the patriline; he will continue the family name. On the other hand, a girl is of no use to her father; her contribution is to be made in her husband’s house. Some of the common terms used for a girl are ‘a bird of passage’, ‘another’s property’, ‘a guest in the parent’s house’, ‘a thing to be preserved for an outsider’, ‘a thing which has to be given away’, etc. In the patrilineal and patrilocal kinship systems, a son is considered his father’s successor and he builds up the family prestige and prosperity. These notions ordain a special value to the son. The World’s Fertility Survey of 1983 studied forty developing countries and found that Bangladesh is one of the countries that have the strongest preference for a son.

The majority except a few of the tribes of the Bangladeshi population follows the patrilineal system. Mothers frequently exhibit strong preferences for the birth of sons because their status in the family and their future security depend on them. If they are widowed or divorced they will have to depend on their sons. Similarly, there are differential treatments towards children according to their sexes. It is a proved fact that for lack of food and care, the mortality rate for girls less than five years of age

ranges from thirty five to fifty per cent higher than that for boys in the same age group.¹

The social arrangements for patrilocal residence further undermine women's status. After marriage, a woman is suddenly thrust into a strange environment with people whom she does not know, and from then on she is in a way cut off from the potential support of her own kin. The woman's identity and status also depend on her socio-biological role of reproducing the patrilineage.

Women's subordination to men is conditioned by a whole range of such institutional practices embedded in the family and in the kin-group. The real problem of subordination is not religion or tradition, but patriarchal influence and authority over them. Men have interpreted religion, moulding it to perpetuate the patriarchal dominion, and consequently patriarchal religious tradition in Bangladesh conflicts with feminist ideology, whether Islamic or non-Islamic, and many a times conflicts initiate violence.

In a report prepared for Special Programme WID, Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs (DGIS) titled 'Violence against women in Bangladesh, Pakistan, Egypt, Sudan, Senegal and Yemen' Rachel Marcus includes battering of women, murder, acid throwing and mugging, abduction, rape, etc. as violence against women in Bangladesh (Marcus 1993). However, gender violence is present in all societies; it is a structural phenomenon 'embedded in the context of cultural, socio-economic and political power relations...[which] reduce women to economic and emotional dependency, the property of some male protector. Societies organised around gendered, hierarchical power relations give legitimacy to violence against women.' (Schuler 1992)

¹ This view is evident in literatures, like in: Mosely, Wiley H., et al, *Demographic Characteristics of a Population Laboratory in Rural East Pakistan*, Dhaka, 1970; De Souza, Alfred (ed.), *Women in Contemporary India and South Asia*, New Delhi, 1980; Khan, Azizur Rahman and Mahbub Hossain, *The Strategy of Development in Bangladesh*, London, 1989, Aziz, K.M.A., 'Daughters and Sons in Rural Bangladesh : Gender Creation from Birth to Adolescence'. In Krishnaraj, Maithereyi and Karuna Channa (eds.), *Gender and the household Domain: Social Cultural Dimensions*, New Delhi, 1989.

Rise of Consciousness and Feminist movements in Bengal and Bangladesh that has influenced the adaptations

According to Samita Sen, 'gender' has been central as an issue from the very beginning of Indian nation. An overwhelming preoccupation with the 'women's question' began from the nineteenth century Social Reform Movement. (Sen 2002: 459-524)

Violence against women around the world evoked resistance, and Bangladesh is not an exception in this regard. The present gender situation in Bangladesh has been the harvest of a long fought struggle for rights in our part of the world. The first feminist movements in India and Bengal involved two issues: 'sati' and 'purdah', and the colonial power had an important role in them. The Royal Edict of 1859 indicated the formal end of Mughal rule in India, and it called for a considerable change in attitudes among the Indian people. The effects of change were first seen among the Hindus who started learning English. Securing the patronage of the rulers, they soon filled the available posts that fetched political and administrative powers as well. A need to synthesize the older elements to suit the contemporary needs proposed ways to broaden Hindu religious and social concepts. The most spectacular socio-cultural change in these concerned the situation of women. Religious leaders and social reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy (1774-1833), Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar (1820-1891) had considerable contribution in this regard. Vidyasagar led the movement to abolish the custom of 'sati' (self-immolation of widows) and to rehabilitate widows the culmination of which was the Widow Remarriage Act of 1869. On the other hand, the followers of Ram Mohan Roy were champions of women's emancipation and education. Woman's place was still in the home as mother and homemaker, but formal education for girls was also considered important at that time.

The response to changes during the British rule among the Muslims was rather slow and guarded. Among the Muslims of Bengal the idea of acquiring formal education augmented much later, and it affected only the men. The lives of Bengali Muslim women did not change as that of Hindu or Brahmo women. Hindu and Muslim attitudes towards the women were fundamentally the same: both emphasized women's biological roles defined in terms of reproduction; women were considered vulnerable who must be guarded from the lust of the strangers. Despite the

similarities, Bengali Hindus never went to the extreme form of sex segregation practiced by Bengali Muslims in regards to education. For Muslims, the education of women was violation of the rules of ‘purdah’ enjoined by the *Quran* and sanctioned by *Hadith* (Hossain 1981).

The figure of Indian woman during the colonial regime remained complex, multilayered, and heterogeneous. Betty Joseph’s *Reading East India Company* gives us clear-cut image of Indian women upheld by the West during the colonial period. The contrast between a white woman and a brown woman gave rise to the thought that the Indian women are far behind the enjoyment of any human right. The Indian woman was like a cipher to be exchanged, without her body or identity, according to her analysis of the company’s archives. As the protected object in the colony, the Hindu woman also served as a metaphor for Hinduism, its cultural practices, and the private sphere of Hindu subjects. This would have far-reaching implications for shaping the woman question in subsequent colonialist social reform legislation, nineteenth-century nationalist agendas, and postcolonial struggles. (Joseph 2004: 171.)

Feminism as a generally conceived set of cultural and political arguments often found itself within the field of the social mission of imperialism. Joseph points out that *Reading East India Company* is a genealogical investigation into the political implications of this gendered rhetoric as it emerged in the context of British India. The figure of woman has been used in important ways within anti colonialism and nationalism as well as within various representations of imperialism. The British emphasized on the negative aspects of women’s issues both to reflect on the general backwardness of the country and to legitimize imperial rule. The status of women in Indian society was frequently used to redefine the British superiority and to serve as a justification of the colonial rule. The controversial demolition of ‘Sati’ in 1829 is also an achievement of the colonial power with the help of the elite educated class in the local populace.

Illiteracy has been identified as the main cause behind male oppression and deception during the first stage of awareness, i.e., in the colonial Bengal. The literature on

women's issues in the early decades of the past century centred round the discussion on tradition and education. As early as 1904, Begum Rokeya portrayed women as virtual slaves. Her writings showed women as steeped in ignorance and superstition, consequentially, victimized by the established male order. She suggested the emancipation of women through education. Her objective was to open the eyes of Bengali Muslims to the women situation to which they have remained blind so far. Her mission in life was to make the society aware of the need for women's freedom from the extreme restrictions imposed by 'purdah' that both secluded women and excluded them from the mainstream of life (Hossain 1981: 2). She found that this excess of 'purdah' was a way of depriving Muslim women of her class of education and other opportunities enjoyed by males and women of other ethnic beliefs. This cultural and intellectual gap initiated the first reaction from the women during the colonial period.

Another important example of feminist writings at that time is Catherine Mayo's highly sensational book titled *Mother India* that pictured the women in British India as completely subordinated and degraded. The book also criticised child marriage, widowhood, premature consummation and pregnancy, female infanticide, temple prostitution, and *sati*. Mayo suggested that India's plight was to be blamed on Indian men, whose hands were too weak to hold the reins of government and the weakness is rooted in their subordination and abuse of their women. Mayo's book was used by the British to maintain the oppression of colonialism rather than arguing for the removal of male dominance (Liddle and Joshi 1985: 521-529).

Roushan Jahan writes about some radical differences between the writings of Rokeya and Mayo about 'purdah'. According to her, Mayo failed to see that 'purdah' custom prevented the Muslim women from exercising their right to marriage, divorce and inheritance. Her lack of experience about Muslim women in India, and her anti Indian political views, her prejudices, and her focus on Hindu women- all made her account of Indian women's lives partial and incomplete. Rokeya had the advantage of belonging to the culture, and she could take her stance against the 'purdah' system strongly.

However, the message of Mayo's book aroused intense public feelings in India and abroad and many were instigated to write on the agenda. Lajpat Rai (1928) pointed that Mayo failed to provide any historical data and emphasized on the point that Indian women's position was not worse than that of women in Europe and America. D.G. Mukerji (1928), C. G. Ranga Iyer (1927), etc. are among the many others who shared the view that Mayo's work was inadequately documented, full of exaggeration and ethnocentric. Ernest Wood wrote:

There is no indignity in her (the Indian woman's) not going out into the world and fighting in the welter of modern competitive systems. ... Must we see everything in terms of money and commerce? (Wood 1929: 31)

Additionally, Wood's idea of the Indian man's fondness and affection for his wife which he does not show publicly is interesting and related to the discussion of Torvald's feelings for Nora in *A Doll's House*.

Thus, the British period was an enterprise of prejudices related to gender matters. The problem of the feminist writers of the period, like Begum Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain or Katherine Mayo was that they did not define the real needs of women in India and were only focusing on the subordination of women and searching for solutions in general sexual equality and other western notions of liberation and independence (Mansoor 1999: 63).

The rising nationalists were frequently using images of women to uphold their agendas. Women secured the place of 'Mother India' in a nationalist sense during the last phase of colonialism, and there have been images of Devi Durga, the supreme Hindu goddess-like women representing the map of India everywhere, on calendars, match boxes, or cigarette packets. The Hindu goddesses are held to be powerful, masculine, and knowledgeable. However, the Hindu women did not share any of their powers as they were deprived of education, power, and possession of wealth. The elites used the figure of woman for the nationalist cause but after the liberation the post-colonial elite has roped the more elite Indian woman into the past and freed men to be figures of modernity (Joseph 2004: xi).

During the East Pakistan period, the country saw many changes including women activists participating in student politics, and taking part in the uprisings of 1952 Language Movement, in the Mass Revolution in 1969, and in the war of Independence in 1971. During the War and the subsequent reconstructive period, Bangladeshi women played a grand role; women actively participated in the battle for independence; they met the occupying army, nursed the war-wounded men, assisted violated women in convalescing, so on and so forth. Taramon Bibi was among the liberation warriors valiantly resisting the 100,000-strong army. Using war weapons, she encountered the soldiers on the frontlines of war. Initially, she was recruited to the resistance camp for so-called womanly duties as cooking and cleaning, but her keenness as a markswoman combined with valour made her a commendable combatant (Amin et al. 2002).

Despite the periodic breaks and ruptures between the nationalist (male) forces and women activists, women's incorporation into a reformed national agenda set the frame for their rights and the discourses surrounding it through the seventies.

In East Pakistan the emphasis on the family as the natural female domain remained unexamined although there were a few women's organisations that saw their dawn. Bangladesh Mahila Parishad (Women's Council of Bangladesh) founded initially as the East Pakistan Mahila Parishad with the initiative of Begum Sufia Kamal (prominent poet in the 60s and 70s) on 4 April 1970. This was formed through conversion of the base organisation *Mahila Sangram Parishad* (Women's Movement Council) created during the days of mass movement in East Pakistan in 1969. Bangladesh Mahila Parishad took active part in the War of Liberation. One of its first efforts was the publication of the book *To the Conscience of People* from within the blockaded Dhaka city in 1971. The book contained photographs and vivid description that showed how the officers and soldiers of the Pakistan army and their collaborators tortured Bengali women. The organisation was renamed Bangladesh Mahila Parishad after the liberation of the country in 1971. It works with the key principles of promotion of women's freedom and development and solidarity with the movement for secular, democratic, and progressive movements in the country.

Recent years displaying women's empowerment and NGO activities, those have been an indirect but active force for consideration of Ibsen on Bangladeshi stage

Bangladesh Government's efforts regarding women's empowerment since 1971 have not been promising. As a response to the first world conference on women in Mexico in 1975, Bangladesh Government established the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs in 1978. According to Naz's study, women's issue received a separate significance in the fifth five year plan (1997-2002) where a separate National Action Plan (NAP) was developed and approved by the Government to relate women's development as an integral part of national development (Naz 2004: 14-15). The span of the project is important for my discussion. I scrutinise this fifth year plan as a result of the heightened importance of gender equity that encompassed the contemporary development plan of the government that was also pressurised by donor countries, development agencies, and international bodies. The meeting up of Ibsen plays under discussion with these years is important. *Krishnabibar* was staged in 1996 and *A Doll's House* in 2001.

Usually a five-year plan in the National level is taken up after a lot of consideration regarding needs at the national and international levels. The Fourth World Conference on Women: Action for Equality, Development and Peace in Beijing from the 4th to 15th September, 1995 must have been a great international influence. The principal themes of the conference were the advancement and empowerment of women in relation to women's human rights, women and poverty, women and decision-making, the girl-child, violence against women and other areas of concern. The outcome was the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action that was adopted by consensus on 15 September 1995. The Declaration embodies the commitment of the international community to the advancement of women and to the implementation of the Platform for Action, ensuring that a gender perspective is reflected in all policies and programmes at the national, regional and international levels. Possibly, NAP was a response to that.

The participation of women in political sphere and women's emergence as the head of State power must have been another reason. In 1991, Bangladesh had the first female Prime Minister. This has been the result of a slow process of acknowledging women's

regular participation in politics, which is again related with kinship and male dominance. Socially prescribed roles since the ancient times limited women's access to economic resources, for which women could not participate in political and other decision-making that might have affected their lives. Bangladeshi women's contribution to political history is often related to known male figures, using dominant languages (literally and conceptually). Other women, other voices tend to be drowned, suppressed. It is public struggle, one that is derivative from the nationalist movement that forms the main narrative. There is rarely any woman who has an individual political identity. Good examples are former Prime ministers Shaikh Hasina and Khaleda Zia both of whom enjoyed the highest seat of political power because of the male leaders in the family, i.e., Hasina's father Sheikh Muzibur Rahman and Khaleda's husband Ziaur Rahman. Still, it must be acknowledged that, in the political decision making, a space for women has been created in that decade when Ibsen's *A Doll's House* was first performed on Bangladeshi stage as *Putul Khela* by Khaled Khan and 'Kanthasheelan.'

Recent years have marked a visible development in women's empowerment since then. There is a provision for 3 out of 12 seats (25%) to be reserved for women in the Union Council and 3 to 5 out of 12 to 15 for municipalities. Ironically, only six women were directly elected in 2001 in the national assembly, representing only 2% of the total (Thomas & Lateef 2004). In 2008 election, 50 woman candidates contested in 52 seats. In 2001, 38 women contested from 48 constituencies (<http://www.nowpublic.com/world/record-number-women-aspirants-bangladesh-elections>, visited on 2.2. 2009 at 10.00). These females were nominated by both the Awami League (AL) and BNP, considering that their husbands became ineligible for being convicted in different corruption and criminal cases. Highest 18 women have won 22 parliamentary seats in this election, meaning the new parliament will have the highest number of at least 63 female lawmakers, including 45 to be elected to reserve seats, in the history of Bangladesh. The newly appointed Home and Foreign ministers are both females, which is an addition to the political history of Bangladesh. This is how the newspapers have applauded the victory: "The fortunate female MP-elects have defeated their male counterparts in the landmark ballots for the ninth parliament in most cases by huge margins, giving the nation a hope for the long-desired empowerment of women." (<http://www.iknowpolitics.org/en/node/8268>, visited on

02.02.2009, at 10:45) Why the nation desired women's empowerment is already stated, a balance in the power structure must be brought if one has to break the patriarchal tradition of women's oppression. However, this goal has not been possibly attained because of religion has been playing a very important role in National agendas.

A very recent example of the Government efforts to bring some balance in rights is presented here. In March, 2008, the interim caretaker Government took initiatives to implement some modifications in the domestic laws. Among the clauses there have been some that evoked the wrath of local Islamic leaders who shot complains against phrases like "equality, equal rights and affirmative action," and against those sections that asked for giving women equal human and fundamental rights such as political, economic, social and cultural. According to their viewpoint, "just rights" should be ensured for men and women in light of the *Quran* and *Sunnah* or *Hadith*. They also opposed the provision of a child's being identified by both the mother and father, saying it "encourages sexual abuse" and pre-marital cohabitation. They recommended identifying a child by "legally married" parents. (<http://www.thedailystar.net/story.php?nid=32657>, visited on 08.01.2009, at 11:48)

Suggesting inclusion of guidelines "in the light of the Quran and Sunnah" while taking any decision regarding women's rights, the ulema recommended abolishing the section that suggests steps to implement the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). Asking the government to withdraw Bangladesh from the convention, they said many sections in it go against the belief, spirits and culture of the Muslim ummah. The election at the end of 2008 reflects the renaissance among the mass people who have started to decode the language of the Islamic leaders.

What has happened in the last century? Sarah C White's research on women in Bangladesh ends up in a realization:

Mention women in Bangladesh and you are likely to conjure up one of three sharply contrasting images. Predominant is the picture of urgent need: women with pleading hands outstretched, desperate in the latest wake of the latest disaster. Next is the picture of submission: sari-shrouded women clinging to the shadows or hunched mutely over laborious work. Alternative pictures show

women working, demonstrating, in groups or defiantly alone. Again the message is clear: these women, though poor, are militant and strong. They claim solidarity, not pity; support, not charity. (White 1992: 1)

She considers foreign aid as a predominant influence for studies on women and aid organizations as key consumers and sponsor of them. This is rather a sad fact for all the developing countries, the initiatives come from an expectation of receiving foreign aids through the condition that the equality project would be one of the issues of the campaign.

The constitution of Bangladesh grants equal rights to women and men in all spheres of public life. Unfortunately, in the private spheres, the discriminative personal laws still prevail. Marriage, divorce, custody of children, laws of inheritance, etc. are still the same. During the years of post Independent Bangladesh, gender inequality and violence against women became a hot issue. The NGOs emphasized on these, and thus women question could not remain a question of rights only; it was inevitably linked with male verdicts in the form of 'Fatwa' on women. Nari Pokkho, a small autonomous women's group, and Bangladesh Mahila Parishad, have both always been vocal on issues of gender-based violence. Bangladesh Mahila Parishad, formally linked to the Communist party, provides legal assistance to women. The Government of Bangladesh's Women's Affairs Directorate has also established some hostels for battered and threatened women, and offers counselling services.

The main strategies the women's organisations employ in Bangladesh to combat inequality and violence against women are: publicizing and organising around particular cases in regards to violence against women; legal awareness work; and conscientization of both women and men on issues of gender inequality. Bangladesh Jatiyo Mahila Ainjibi Samity or the National Association of Women Lawyers was founded towards the end of 1980s, and since then it has organised legal awareness classes aiming to reach 50 million women, and some men (Huda 1986, as quoted in Page 1993). Ain-o-Shalish Kendro, a women-oriented legal issues and aid group formed in 1989, also deals with domestic violence. Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC) is also working for the same goal of gender equality and development, mainly through education, has 70 percent women members in the grassroots levels. NGOs such as Nijera Kori, Saptagram and Proshika are active in

conscientizing women and men on issues of rights and economic independence, and Grameen Bank organisers are also working in this area.

Helen T. Thomas, Shireen Latif and Ferdousi Sultana write in their ADB Country Report of 2004 on Bangladesh:

Contributions from women have been vital for improvements in key development in key development indicators over recent years. Participation of women in the wage labor force has increased, particularly in the ready-made garment (RMG) sector where women make up over 90% of the 1.5 million workforce that currently brings in approximately 70% of the country's foreign currency earnings and enhances the incomes of many families....Girls are enrolling in primary school on an equal basis with boys indicating a significant change in family attitudes towards the value of girls, not only economically but as individuals with a right to education as well. It is anticipated that as these girls become adults, their higher levels of education will bring significant economic gains to their households and communities. (Thomas et al. 2004: 1-2)

This report shows how far the country has advanced since the time of Begum Rokeya. Historically women have not participated effectively in the governance of public services. The situation has been changing during the last decades. Social mobilizations by NGOs have encouraged greater number of women to run for the positions formerly held by males alone.

UNICEF has had a very important position in Bangladesh since its establishment and its contribution to the gender situation in Bangladesh. As I mentioned earlier, Women in Development (WID) approach emerged in the 1970s with the objective of devising policies and actions to integrate women into development; the I discussed about GAD, the new approach that developed in the 1980s as a response to the perceived failure of WID approach. Later on, I mentioned Millennium Development Goals that started in the 1990s also included gender equality among the time-bound targets that are to be achieved by 2015. Bangladesh celebrates the International Women's Day on March 8 as a part of the global celebration for the economic, political and social achievements of women. UNICEF introduced a cartoon since the 1990 where a nine year old girl is featured who discusses grave issues about girls and their rights. Bangladesh observes Meena Day on September 24 since 1998, to celebrate the famous animated girl character that stands for child rights and gender equality.

The cultural mindset and Ibsen plays staged in Bangladesh: Money playing Roles?

Goethe Cultural Centre arranged a two-day meet with women writers, entitled 'A Different Perspective' in January, 1996, where both men and women writers read from their stories and poems. The programme in a way represents the cultural pattern of thinking while the differences of men and women are considered. I quote from some of the translated stories and poems that were later compiled in a volume titled *Different Perspectives: Women Writing in Bangladesh*. Selina Hossain (a prominent female novelist who has been interviewed) read her short story 'Izzat' (Honour) that encompasses a woman's life who was one of the many wives of a rich landowner who kills her because of suspicion. The dead woman asks,

What is vice? What is virtue? What is this world? What is the after-life?... [...] Why can a man have four wives and be considered respectable? If anything, his respectability increases with the number of wives. But the woman who is hungry for love, who does not want to be one of four wives, the woman who wants to arrange her life a little differently – is all the fault hers? She besmirches the family honour, therefore she has to die. (Azim and Zaman 1998: 3-4)

Mahbooba Mahmood (an active member of Naripokkhkho since 1983)'s poem 'Not Just Love' expressed the same womanly anguish:

Love is no longer enough.
Give me some triumphal song
Filled with honeyed life.
No more humiliation, no more.

To live a life of endless endurance,
To cover the body with shame,
To be scorched by life – meaningless survival –

No more, no more –
This meaningless existence no more –
Little by little, revenge turns to resistance.
Throw off the shameful folds of
Needless ornamentation.

Leave your beds.
Listen to the call of war
Liberating humanity.
The revolution now is
For life, for freedom. (ibid: 9)

Dilara Mesbah, a professional writer, in her short story 'The Ballad of Nihar Banu' writes about a self-educated woman who creates a private world within her mind to get rid of the position she has in society. In her beautiful world she invokes Begum Rokeya and says,

Sister Rokeya, ...[...] Women have not yet succeeded in improving themselves. They continue to allow themselves to be degraded. ... Bengali women are like stone on which moss has been gathering for ages...I know that even now my countrymen do not grant women their rights. (ibid: 59)

The protagonist feels an urge to "set out on a long journey, travelling the world in an endless quest, singing continually a paean to women," (ibid 1998: 63) and assures herself that although there is no one to accompany her, she should not be scared because she is her own friend, philosopher and guide.

The concept of universality, it has been seen, masks and conceals those structures that keep relations of power intact, and perpetrates a system of values, which, because it is presented as universal, transcends critical and political questioning. (ibid: Introduction xi)

I refer to that particular event to emphasize the fact that when CAT staged *Ghosts*, or a few years before that, when 'Kanthasheelan' staged *Putul Khela* in Bangladesh, the discussion on gender roles of men and women already got a direction towards the exploitation and injustice that are usually accorded to women.

In the 80s and 90s, women's movement got the highest flow in Bangladesh, and the outcome was visible in the cultural activities. Thus, Ibsen was considered important and that was the beginning of staging his plays. The first play to be formally introduced on stage was naturally *A Doll's House*. In 1993, *Putul Khela* staged by 'Kanthasheelan', achieved tremendous applause. The play was observed through the lenses of gender that became obvious in the newspaper reviews. For example, the *Daily Ittefaq's* coverage mentioned, "This play has truly introduced an artistic way to give expression to the long sought women's lib movements" (16 July, 1993 issue, my translation). 31 January, 1993 issue of *Vorer Kagoj* mentioned that the play was formally inaugurated by Sufia Kamal, who was simultaneously a prominent female poet in the 60s and 70s and a gender activist connected with Bangladesh Mahila Parishad (Women's Council of Bangladesh) founded initially as the East Pakistan Mahila Parishad. She introduced Ibsen and *A Doll's House* to the audience, and the newspaper says that she told that the play shows how women are oppressed by the

patriarchal society. The whole decade wanted to hear that message and it was delivered. I do not wonder that the theatre group invited a renowned gender activist to open the event, and that she would relate the story as something related with patriarchy. Bangladeshi intellectual class has always treated the play as a representative of women's struggle for freedom and right.

Ibsen's plays are not directly related to the whole discussion of gender if not considered the span of their staging. When they touch a number of issues that have been discussed through the decades in relation with women's struggle for human rights, they become very close to the local people and situation. It is already established by the academia that one and the most important issue of all is the gender issue that has introduced Ibsen in other parts of the world. The discussion on Ibsen and Gender has almost become a cliché, as it has been the most vigorously discussed issue through centuries. As Julie Holledge has found out that one of the reasons *A Doll's House* has been so successful across the globe is because of its overt discussion about power relationships between men and women. In this regard, I would once again recall Professor Sonia Nishat Amin's comments that the situation in the west has changed widely during the last century, but in the third world countries, it is still a critical one.

Staging of *Ghosts* and *A Doll's House*, in this socio-political situation, have been important events that have enabled women to express, at least during the shows, their pain and pathos. While *A Doll's House* was first introduced in Kolkata by 'Little Theatre Group', and then by 'Bahurupee', there was a question regarding women's rights. *Ghosts* was also staged by the latter. There was no question of monetary involvement with their staging.

In Bangladesh (former East Pakistan) Ibsen was translated for the first time by Abdul Huq in 1966, and the first play he chose to translate was *A Doll's House*. He did not receive any publication grant from anyone. After the independence, there was no remarkable Ibsen practice until the 90s when Ibsen was introduced in the public universities as part of European Literature. The play that was mostly studied by students was *A Doll's House*. When Khaled Khan introduced Ibsen in on stage in Independent Bangladesh in 1993, he also chose *A Doll's House* where there was no involvement of money. What may have inspired all these people to read and work on

a particular play by Ibsen is obviously the play's worldwide popularity and as a play speaking on behalf of women's movement. Ibsen himself denied any connection with gender debates; yet, the play's overt connection with gender could never be neglected. The choice of *A Doll's House* has nothing to do with money.

Ibsen is still part of university curriculum, and students read *A Doll's House* as a play about women's emancipation with the same zeal. They are even asked to participate in debates regarding the role of Nora in the play. One good example is Ahmed Ahsanuzzaman's examining the psyche of nine female students whose paradoxical answers to his questions regarding Nora's response to the roles of a wife and a mother (Ahsanuzzaman 2007: 114-115). I also faced the same pattern of questions that focused the gender relationships and a woman's vocation in a patriarchal society in 1997 when I was a student of Dhaka University. I know that the next generation of students who will be reading Ibsen will face similar questions, possibly with added variations. Theatricality of a play is important, but in Ibsen's case, the emphasis has always been on social issues.

Professor Krishna Sen (personal correspondence, 21.08.2008) has expressed how *A Doll's House* is studied in India as part of 'History of Literature' or 'Drama' papers, where G. B. Shaw is also included:

In a sense that when someone reads *A Doll's House* at an early stage, one only reads it with a perspective of 'the New Woman,' as Bernard Shaw is in the course, and as Ibsen is one of those who practically launched the concept in Western or European theatre, one really thinks only in those terms.

Professor Shafi Ahmed (personal correspondence, 11.07.2008) shares the same view, and he mentions some of the reasons for which this particular play was chosen as part of the curriculum:

Firstly, it is by *A Doll's House* Ibsen is known all over the world. If you have to choose one, as *Hamlet* is for Shakespeare, *A Doll's House* is a good academic choice. Secondly, I myself always have advocated the cause of women, and so when I wanted my students, particularly my girl students, to be enlightened, to bring them more to uphold the issue of women, *Doll's House* was certainly the first choice. I must mention that some good students are reading many other plays as well.

So, there is no obvious financial reason for introducing *A Doll's House* in Bangladesh. On the other hand, *Ghosts* is less known than *A Doll's House*, still this is one of the Ibsen plays that was initially staged in South Asia. I did not or could not investigate more about *Ghosts*, as there are fewer people in Bangladesh who have read the play, or have been present at its performances. The play had fifty six successful shows, and I have mostly depended on the published materials on the performances that I could get hold of, like the programme notes and newspaper reviews. I have tried to present some of them in the following chapters, and all of the available documents show that the play was received as representation of contemporary gender debate regarding women's freedom. For example, the discussions were on if they are allowed to choose their life partners, their legal right to divorce, their struggle to lead a moderate life, their duties and responsibilities, their imprisonment within the social codes, etc. Thus, *Ghosts* also resonated to the need for upholding the social picture, which had nothing to do with monetary interest.

Krishnabibar and *Putuler Itikatha* were financed by the Royal Norwegian Embassy based in Dhaka. The long gap in staging of Ibsen plays between 1993 and 1996 may raise questions about the involvement of money. It is a question whether it is ever possible to practice Ibsen without money. I strongly claim that it is possible. Abdul Huq made it possible when he translated a good number of Ibsen plays, 'Kanthasheelan' made it possible when they staged it formally, many amateur theatre productions were also there throughout the 80 s and 90s without any financial assistances. Norwegian money provided CAT with logistic supports for staging the plays; but it does not necessarily mean that money influenced those events.

I will explain the several departures in the stage productions from the original texts in the next chapters. I believe that the changes were brought forth because of the socio-political needs of the time, which centred on gender. Obviously, CAT's staging of the particular plays in 1996 and in 2001 must have had something to do with the local and global events i.e., gender development projects. Monetary involvement of Norway evidently has some connection with them, but it has not proved harmful so far I have evaluated. The interests are apparently development in the underdeveloped sectors and gender is one of the main underdeveloped sectors in Bangladesh.

Moreover, being provoked by Bharucha's claim that "the outsiders who give it [money] are the ones who control the 'cultural exchange', and however cosmopolitan or altruistic they may be, they are still figures of authority" (Bharucha 1993: 37), I tried to uncover the truth. It was obvious that the Royal Norwegian embassy would not provide for anything unless it had connection with its national interest. That was part of the deal. I never had the doubt about that. I did not expect anyone to receive money from Norway for staging Shakespeare, as it was equally impossible to extract money from the British Council to stage Ibsen. Instead, what interested me was the thought if the choice of *Ghosts* was dictated by the Embassy. I came to know that Nilu had not been discovered by the Embassy and that it had not asked him to stage Ibsen. Nilu initiated the move and he approached the Embassy for a grant. It proves that the interest was latent in the culture, and the Embassy being convinced of the local Ibsen interest supported the move.

Nilu was not dictated to stage *Ghosts*. With an urge to adhere to the socio-political environment of the country, he decided to stage that particular play, which is evident in his Director's 'Note' (1996) in the play's programme notes:

Today while we speak of liberty and progress of women, perhaps we realize less than Ibsen did the precarious position of a woman in the society. This is an absolute truth for a country like Bangladesh. Here women suffer both at home and at the outer spheres. Ibsen's plays represent women who, like the most of the women in Bangladesh, suffer from exploitation of political, social, economic, and religious issues. Whenever somebody reads/visualizes the theme and context of 'Ghosts', it will immediately strike as though this drama was meant to represent a society like Bangladesh. Considering all above, perhaps, the Centre for Asian Theatre selected the best play for its start-up.

The Royal Norwegian Embassy provided for the play as it coincided with Norwegian Government's interests. NORAD and the embassies in Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Zambia organised their W&GE efforts in 1992 and the Strategy was approved in 1997 after five years of preparation. As its main challenge was "to move from policies and goals to translating W&GE into country level dialogue, programming and operations" (Aasen et al. 2005: 3), the Embassy found it opportune to promote the national cause. Besides, it would initiate promotion of Norwegian literature and culture as well. Thus, the local interest combined with foreign money brought the event into reality.

I would not take the situation as kind of ‘Cultural exploitation’ or ‘*uneven globalization*’ as Bharucha claims some intercultural exchanges to be where monetary involvement unduly facilitates the donors’ intentions. I do not find any interest in Norwegian Government’s funding for Ibsen other than that of promoting a Norwegian playwright and probably some social development as a bi-product with it. Emancipation of women has been one of the development strategies of the Norwegian Government that has influenced several bilateral agreements in Bangladesh. I may furnish relevant data in favour of this claim. Bangladesh received 137 316005 NOK in 2006 in several sectors like health, education, trade and cultural activities. Women in Development (WID) and other women organizations like FOKUS (Forum for Women and Development), Naripokkhkho, Karmajibi Nari, etc. got 3933000 NOK. CAT received 720000 NOK for arranging the Ibsen festival in the country in 2006. (Landstatistikk av NORAD i Bangladesh 2006, <http://statistikkportalen.norad.no/Main.aspx?Report=StatReport3>, visited on 1.2.2009, at 11.00). These figures do not get any significance if we do not connect them with some interest on the part of Norwegian Government.

There is no doubt that the arrangement of the festival on Ibsen’s Death centennial is a way to promote the name of a Norwegian dramatist to the public of Bangladesh. The kind of grand festival on any other occasion has been rare in the country. Money has been an important factor in the soft diplomacy in the Twentieth and the current centuries. It is not possible for a third world country to prevent the flow of money. I believe it is better to see if the aid can be properly utilized instead of trying to avoid it.

I must say that we find similarities between women like Nora or Mrs. Alving and the Bangladeshi women. Since the Nineteenth century Norwegian Noras have come a long way and Norway is now the country that allows the highest care for women’s rights. Bengal or Bangladesh has never been free of the curse, and even now, women here are in the state of Nora. That may have been one of the most important reasons for Bangladeshi audience to find the images of their women reflected in Nora and Mrs. Alving. Money could not attract the audience if the plays had not their appeal to the local audience, and the number of shows across the country could not have been possible.

Chapter 3: *Krishnabibar*, CAT's First Production

Ghosts is subtitled “A Family Drama” with a woman as a major character. Brian Johnston writes that Ibsen followed Hegel’s argument closely in the play while in Hegel’s account of the Ethical community, the state is the masculine realm, and the family the feminine (Johnston 1969: 93). I would not go to the philosophical world of Hegel, but would emphasize that even in this feminine world of family, the influence of the masculine is easily noticeable. For example, Johnston argues that the image of young dead Captain Alving is central in the play and that is the last and most powerful ghost to haunt the play that constitutes the tragic ‘recognition’ of its action. (ibid: 105-106). Though apparently feminine, the play’s masculine influence is at once established.

Joan Templeton has pointed out how the criticism of Eric Bentley, Muriel Bradbrook, Derek Russell Davis, Rolf Fjelde, Daniel Haakonsen, Brian Johnston, and Evert Sprinchorn, etc. have pointed to Helene Alving’s failure to perform her conjugal obligations lovingly and brings on her husband’s ruin (Templeton 1986: 57). While male critics maintain that *Ghosts* is about a woman who should have known better how to love a man she married for convenience, critics like Templeton argue, “The tragic action of *Ghosts* is not the quest of a woman who discovers that she should have been more loving to a man she did not love but the revelation of the pollution caused by her surrender, not once, but twice, to that man” (ibid: 58).

This process of critical debates once again proves that critical eyes always judge the women, never the men. Derek Russell Davis, who considers Oswald as the central character, blames his mother for his failures. He sees the events from the point of view of a doctor who diagnoses Oswald’s disease as schizophrenia. His aetiological analysis says:

His mother was not free at the time of her marriage to form a good relationship with her husband. For one thing, she could not accept his sexuality, for reasons which are not known; the premature loss of her father may have had something to do with it. For another thing, she was in love with another man. As is typical of women who are repelled by sexuality, she had chosen a man of doubtful potency. (Davis 1963: 81)

It is a very interesting observation, indeed! He has found out that she was repelled by sexuality; the connection with her father's death and Pastor Manders' potencies add further confusion to her character. This is how society judges a woman. Therefore, *Ghosts* turns out to be a discussion of man-woman relationship where the power imbalance furnishes gender debates.

It is commonly known that *Ghosts* was a reply to the furious attacks on *A Doll's House*. Ibsen said that he had to write *Ghosts* as he had to create Mrs. Alving after Nora (Meyer 1971: 490). *Ghosts* observes what could have happened if Nora stayed back or came back. James McFarlane's comments are important here. According to him, Mrs. Alving's story is "the career of one who also slammed the door on her husband and ran off into the night, but who was persuaded to return to the path of duty with all its alarming consequences" (McFarlane 1961: 3). He also blames her for making husband promiscuous by creating for him a joyless "duty-ridden home environment" (ibid: 16). Ibsen also received harsh criticism for creating her character. Dale Ramsay writes in a commentary on the staging of the play in Pearl Theatre in New York in 1992 in a playgoer's supplement:

For venturing into "free-thinking" as it was called in his day, Ibsen paid a price, and he received much punishment from the critics. The play in its published form was considered scandalous, as having attacked the sanctity of marriage and of doing one's duty. No one would produce it. One producer, asked if he would put it on, replied: "The play is one of the filthiest things ever written in Scandinavia." In Copenhagen, the Royal Theatre's official censor reported: "It takes as the main theme of its action a repulsive pathological phenomenon, at the same time undermining the morality which forms the foundation of our social order." (*Pearl*, September 1995)

It is evident that the social order is justified only when a woman acts according to it. It was expected that Mrs. Alving would sexually respond to her husband once she had come back, but since she failed to do that, she is harshly criticised by the male critics. Templeton's classroom humour "Pastor Manders is still with us, creeping between the lines on Ibsen's commentators" (Templeton 1986: 65) is true in a sense.

From the judgement of the patriarchal order, Mrs. Alving is a criminal, and her crime is related with the power of eroticism, as Professor Kajal Bandyopadhyay (personal correspondence, 7.7.2008) comments:

Mrs. Alving is guilty of making her husband exogamous. She knew that she had a power of satisfying her husband, and her denial to respond to his desires made Alving go to the maid. In a way, she caused his venereal disease.

On the other hand, Professor Sonia Nishat Amin, of Women's Studies at Dhaka University, and noted Ibsen scholar in Bangladesh, has vehemently opposed the idea that Mrs. Alving had anything to do with her husband's debauchery. According to her, a woman can have her own choice to deny the sexual relationship with a man who is already polygamous (Amin, personal correspondence, 7.7.2008). These contradictory views between two Ibsen scholars can be a good starting point to accentuate the gender conflict existing in Bangladesh, and a play like *Ghosts* that has remarkable gender discussion within the text, would naturally excite gender debates.

***Ghosts* in Bangladesh:**

Interestingly, CAT chose *Ghosts* as its first production, although *A Doll's House* had already had its reputation established in Bangladesh. In 1993, Khaled Khan staged *A Doll's House* as *Putul Khela* in Shombhu Mitra's translation. I believe, from an artistic point of view, it became necessary to produce a fresh Ibsen play that was not staged in the country before. The question is, "why *Ghosts*?" The translator and the director answered to that.

Ahmed Reza, who adapted the play, writes:

While reading Ibsen's *Ghosts*, the socio-cultural scene of my country flashed upon my mind's eye. I could easily relate the characters and events in the play to our contemporary society. (Programme Notes of *Krishnabibar*, 1996)

The director, Kamaluddin Nilu, believes that as the first production of CAT, *Krishnabibar* had been a wonderful and timely choice. He wrote in his Director's Note:

In Bangladesh, the situations are prevalent which *Ghosts* can effectively reflect. People, especially women in Bangladesh, encounter such kind of adverse social pressures which need to be changed...The centre for Asian Theatre considers that Ibsen's *Ghosts* is the best play through which the existing ongoing misdoing can be resisted. (Programme Notes of *Krishnabibar*, 1996)

The play had fifty six successful shows within a year across the country. Forty percent of the total audience of the play were women. All major newspapers applauded the performance. One commendable instance is a report by Sajedul Awwal:

The social milieu of our upper-middle class and the reality of European society of hundred years back are more or less the same, and here lies the relevance of the play and the production. (*Star Weekend Magazine*, August 2, 1996)

Bhorer Kagaj published an article, where the staff reporter mentions:

In *Krishnabibar*, aggression on individual freedom, religious intolerance and prejudices, dreadful oppression of human beings by the social institutions, etc. have been noticed. Women are frequently the victims of all these. Ibsen has unlimited sympathy for women, and many of his plays deal with women's problems. (23 June, 1996, my translation)

Another is that of an issue of *The Financial Express*, published in the same year after the play's premier, that commented:

At a time when the people of the country are virtually trapped inside a vicious chalk-circle of corruption and fast losing their faith in the long-respected moral and ethical codes that has so far failed to provide the desired social emancipation, *Krishnabibar* made a bold attempt at stirring the consciousness of the audience through the process of self-criticism and honest introspection. (22 June, 1996)

Therefore, when *Ghosts* was adapted and staged in Bangladesh in 1996, the main reason for choosing the play, as identified, was the Gender issue. In *Krishnabibar* the issues were mainly the shackles set upon the individuals by the social institutions. The play focused on how social authority suppresses the freedom of the individual by various norms. The suggested themes were girls' education, their rights to choose the partners in marriage, divorce rights, etc. On an extended level, the play focused on child marriage, polygamy, prostitution, sex related diseases, trafficking of women, abortion rights, inheritance law, etc.

Krishnabibar is an adaptation, not actually a literal translation of the Ibsen play. In Bangla 'krishnabibar' does not mean 'ghosts'; it means 'dark hole' or 'black hole'. Nilu claims that in his production, the title is closer to the theme of the play and it is very important in the sense that the play explores the black holes in the society and tries to mark the dark spots and diseases in it. *Krishnabibar* does not have stylistic experimentation and the original realistic form has been preserved. Only the characters' names are changed. In the adaptation Mrs. Alving is Aleya Begum, Oswald is Osman, Regina is Rozina, Pastor Manders is Moulana Mannaf, and Engstrand is Entaz.

How gender is performed in the Bangla play

The play evolves around the story of a rich widow with an unhappy past; a son who stays abroad; a maid who is raised like a foster daughter; a family friend who looks after the family properties, etc. The widow wants to give away everything left by her dead husband in support of his memory. She has built an orphanage that is going to be inaugurated. Family members and friends, dependants and workers are all taking the last moment preparation for the inaugural ceremony.

What is new in it? What can it give to the Bangladeshi audience to think over? The people go to the theatre house not solely for story, and rarely any theatre performance is offered in Bangladesh that does not have a popular issue. What are then the points of interest in *Ghosts* that have attracted the translator, the theatre director, or the audience? The interest is obviously in the theme of gender conflict that is presented through the debate between Moulana Mannaf and Aleya Begum.

The play opens with the music of a flute, a girl enters with two lighted candles, the front stage is a little illuminated and the rest of the stage is dark. Instantly it is understood by any Bangladeshi that the play is set in his country where electricity has not reached all the remote places yet, and where load shedding is a regular phenomenon. The opening scene is a perfect inauguration of the theme. This semi-darkness of the stage becomes symbolic of the whole country that rests in deep darkness.

The play presents two women: Rozina is a rebellious young woman; Aleya Begum is a middle-aged woman who failed to free herself from her unhappy marriage because of the societal and religious pressures. The fight against the evil is fought by these two women and through them the gender problems of contemporary society become apparent.

As an aristocratic Muslim woman in the ‘mufassil’ (not the big city, a small town close to the villages), Aleya Begum maintains ‘purdah’ in front of the males other than her son. Her sari’s end covers her head, and she maintains the usual docile behaviour of a respectable woman. It is expressed through the dialogues that she

never has had a chance to tell her parents that she loved Moulana Mannaf. Her family was very strict, and she was married to Osman's father without her consent.

It is normal in Bangladesh, as has earlier been discussed. Although Islam maintains a law that marriage is legal only when the bride voluntarily accepts it, the practice is of making it mandatory for her. She, as victim of this tradition, could not utter a word against it. This past of Aleya Begum, as recalled on the stage, naturally instigates the ongoing debates about marriage that incorporates child marriage, dowry violence, polygamy of the husband, a girl's freedom to choose her partner, etc. Gender issue, in a country like Bangladesh, takes birth at every turning where there is injustice. No translator or director has to tell it directly to the audience, and I think this automatic birth process of debates will exist as long as social injustice will exist.



Photo: Women are sharing mutual pain. The helplessness is visible on their faces. (Source: DVD)

Rozian's life opens up another chapter in gender discussions. She is an illegitimate child of a housemaid by the master of the house, lacking education; the man who is known as her father wants to exploit her, etc. brings back the medieval 'jamindari' or 'feudal' system in Indian subcontinent as part of a global phenomenon. Using the maids as sex partners was customary among the landlords and those maids could

never tell the truth about the fathers of their children. Money and power bought reputation for the masters whereas the maids were marked as lustful degraded women. The same has happened to Rozina's mother; she married Entaz using Mr. Rahman's money, and all her life was known as a fallen woman. On the other hand, Mr. Rahman (Capt. Alving's Bangladeshi counterpart) remained a benevolent and honourable man.

The discussion on Rozina's future gets new turning in Bangladesh, as she appeared on the stage when thousands of female workers of her class had started their journey with the Ready made garments sector (RMG) in Bangladesh and boosted up the country's economy. Girls like her were regularly sexually harassed at the working places, and organisations like Bangladesh Jatiyo Mahila Ainjibi Samity, Ain-o-Shalish Kendro, etc. were very active regarding these cases. The debate regarding abuse of maidservants and female workers has a special significance in this context.

Rozina's mother could not get rid of the unwanted child by the master of the house who abused her. It involves abortion rights that was a major concern of the Beijing Platform of Action in 1995. Rozina's decision to go away with her stepfather for a life of prostitution adds to the ongoing discussion regarding forced prostitution. Her departure is also seen from the point of view a woman's dream to enter a new hopeful world only to be trapped by a trafficker; it opens up a dark chapter in the world history. Gender issue is found in every phase of the play.

The roles played by the males become part of the gender discussion as they stand as authorities. Entaz is Rozina's father, though biologically she is the daughter of Mr. Rahman who is Mr. Alving's Bangladeshi counterpart. Entaz claims to be her only guardian and wants to force her to take decisions against her will. Moulana Mannaf is the representative of religious institutions, and he is the principal male authority. Osman is the representative of his father, and the new owner of Mr. Rahman's properties. That is why Rozina calls Osman 'Choto Sahib (Young Master),' not by his first name, which is a practice in Bangladesh among the dependants. Power centres on the figures of Mr. Rahman and Moulana Mannaf, as has been mentioned in chapter two. These two male authorities act as shelters for the less powerful males. Entaz gets favour from the pastor as a father, and as a man who showed mercy to a fallen woman

like Rozina's mother. On the other hand, Osman, although weak and barren, gets a superior position because he is the father's son.

The play attacks masculinity in a number of ways. Firstly, the attack is on the father figure. Rozina knows that Entaz is her father. He reminds her several times how he owns her as her father. But Rozina denies any authority of him. Mr. Rahman, Aleya's husband becomes a failure as a father to his son although he was a role model to him in the beginning. Secondly, a hegemonic presentation of the superiority of the male body is criticised in a symbolic way. Both Osman and Rozina are strong, and young, but at the end of the play Osman is becoming an invalid, and seeks either Rozina or his mother's help. He is supposed to grow up as a strong healthy lad, as in the first act Moulana Mannaf asks Rozina whether Osman has grown into a strongly built youth, and she replies in the positive. Obviously, there lies the truth of the sexual disease; still this can be seen as an attack on hegemonic masculinity, which relies on the exposure of the strong male body that is not present in the play. Lack of Osman's verbal aggression and physical and moral strength may be read as a symbolic representation of the defeat of hegemonic masculinity.

All the three males in the play comment on Rozina's grown up body and her physical beauty. Rozina's beauty is seen as an object, and she has shown varying reactions to the comments of different persons. Sometimes she takes it as compliment when Moulana Mannaf or Osman are making comments but she is angry when Entaz comments on her. Interestingly, Rozina puts her in the position of the 'Other' while she is defining the positions of the males through her attitudes and verbal reactions. For example, we are informed that the season is the rainy season, and it is raining outside. Rozina says to Entaz, "The rain is sent down by the devil (My translation)." Entaz says, "It's blasphemous!" When Moulana (a Muslim chaplain is called 'moulana'). Mannaf enters; Rozina marks the same rain as a blessing of 'Allah'. She maintains the value of social ranks or positions, which is seen as a clever way of reciprocating to the symbolic order. Rozina is a fine example of the subaltern who has started talking in Bangladeshi context.

The play testifies the women's verbal aggression, which is a symbol of power. Rozina, with her words, stands against the father figure. Entaz comes in and she

shows very angry attitude towards him because he is a vagabond. He is fond of local wine and is used to telling lies and indulging in frauds; he wants to take Rozina to start a new hotel at Mongla, which is a lively port in Southern Bangladesh. He indicates at the practice of prostitution in the port areas, and he wants to use Rozina for the same purpose. He frequently sings popular tunes from Bangla and Hindi films and uses dirty slangs that are very common among the tramps.



Photo: Rozina spits on Entaz. This is a revolutionary act on her part, and it shows the anger and dissatisfaction that has augmented from the social injustice done to a woman. (Source: DVD)

Though Entaz is not Rozina's real father, the society knows him to be her father and he wants to exploit her situation. He says that legally he is her guardian. Rozina is independent and very careful about taking decisions. She even asks Entaz about the money he is planning to spend in Mongla. What is amazing is that she asks him, "Won't you give me a share?" This shows the real picture of a society that has interrelation of poverty and exploitation. Entaz tells her that if she accompanies him to Mongla she will get her share. Eventually, Rozina leaves with him at the end, and says, "Girls like us must organize everything when there is still time. Once we lose our youth, we will not get back the freshness again. Mother, I have some desires and dreams" (my translation). I have tried to give the essence of the adaptation by the subtle change in the dialogues through my translations of the Bangla speeches instead of importing from the existing English versions. The use of language is important for

the stage production, and Rozina's utterances and her submission at the end appeal to the local audience. Rozina is suppressed by her economic vulnerability. Another reason for the defeat of Rozina's verbal aggression is religion which is a strong social apparatus. Islam shares a strong position in the gender discussion in this play, and there are even quotations from the holy *Quran*. Nilu's idea was that if he used Islamic proclamations it would be more interesting and the audience would accept it (Nilu 1997: 216).



Photo: Rozina physically pushes Entaz down that shows that the subaltern has not learnt to speak only, rather she can act. This photo shows that the play has enacted a little exaggeration of the existing gender debate. This physical violence is accorded to lower class women regularly, and Rozina's act can be considered as an answer to that. (Source: DVD)

However, Rozina is very daring in this play. She spits at him and forcefully knocks him down several times. Nilu has dared to show that the subaltern can speak for herself. The act, on the other hand reflects cultural resistance in Bangladeshi perspective which is absent in Ibsen's play.

At times Rozina is inadequate to stand against all the males. When her voice is silenced, the figure of Aleya Begum appears as the counterpart of Moulana Mannaf. The conflict between them reveals all the major issues like the conflict between religious faith and progressive thoughts, freedom and emancipation of women etc. He investigates why some books are there in the living room, and gets to know that Aleya Begum reads those. The books are very important in the play.



Photo: This photo shows Moulana Mannaf and Aleya Begum engaged in a debate regarding the books. Humayun Azad's book *Naari* has been used here. The control of men over women's education is visible, and Aleya Begum's eager argument shows that she wants to learn more. (Source: DVD)

During a discussion session at a seminar on "Ibsen: From A Transculture Perspective" in Shanghai on April 8, 2008, Nilu claimed that he actually used a book titled *Naari* (Bangla for woman) by Humayun Azad, a famous Bangladeshi author who was the target of Islamic fundamentalists for his secularistic ideas. *Naari*, published in 1992, was a criticism of the patriarchal and male-chauvinistic attitude of religions towards women. The book attracted negative reaction, and the Government of Bangladesh banned the book in 1995. Therefore, the use of the book on the stage in 1996 can be nothing other than the contextualization of Ibsen in local gender debates.

Humayun Azad was akin to the ideas expressing the reasons of women's backwardness in Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*. Beauvoir deciphers inadequate education and institution of marriage and motherhood as the most important factors of women's state of immanence. She sees the first as a natural process just as the oppressor always dwarfs the oppressed; so men intentionally deprive women of education. In the play, Moulana Mannaf says, "You talk about women's movement, progress etc. these days because you read these books. Now the situation in the world is very different. All say- 'let the women be free; let her talk. Is

freedom an infant's toy?' (My translation)" He threatens Aleya Begum so that she does not talk about these openly.



Photo: Moulana Mannaf raises his finger towards heaven and here he utters 'Allah' several times that is a common expression among the Muslims in Bangladesh. His strength is coming from the usurpation of religious sphere by men like him who control the mind of common people who are mostly ignorant of the teachings of Islam. (Source: DVD)

The discussion regarding books and Allah's order is relevant if considered from the socio-cultural point of view. A very recent example can be cited here to support the idea that religion is playing a vital role in gender discussion in Bangladesh. Exploring the daily newspapers of the second and third weeks of March 2008, anybody would easily understand how gender discussion is influenced by religion in Bangladesh. A misunderstanding took place between the government and the local Islamic scholars regarding the National Women Development Policy adopted last year.

NWDP suggested legalising equal rights for women - including property rights – as well as a 40 percent quota for women on the government's high executive, judiciary and legislative branches, parliament and local government bodies. However, a section of Islamic hardliners went up against the NWDP 2008, terming it “anti-*Quran*” and they continued to excite people across the country against the policy and threatened greater violence in future. On the other hand, more than 25 women's organisations threatened to seek tougher measures if the government backed out from its announced policy at a press conference on 14 May. The situation became violent. Later the

women and children affairs adviser had to make everything clear and declare that there was no proposal for amending the Muslim inheritance law. She said that women should have equal opportunities and control over the property earned by them as studies have found that women in many cases do not have control over their own income (Cited from electronic edition of the 15 May, 2008 issue of 'The Daily Star,' found at <http://www.thedailystar.net/story.php?nid=36622>, visited on 4.1.2009 at 12.00).

People like Mannaf misinterpret religion, and give unfair opportunity to bad people like Entaz and Osman's father to suppress the women. He even mentions 'Fatwa,' which is common in Bangladeshi society. Mannaf says to Aleya Begum, "As a wife you were obliged to take care of your husband. Remember that a wife's heaven is under the feet of her husband" (my translation). In reply, Aleya Begum says that she does not acknowledge the decree. Here the debate about the interpretation of *Quranic* verse regarding duty of a woman has been brought to the audience's attention.

She mentions the debauchery of her husband, but Mannaf is not ready to accept her remark. He says, "How can a wife judge her husband's activities? A wife is bound to serve her husband. You should have followed what Allah has decreed upon you. Nevertheless, you left your husband, house, and community and did not give a fig to your respectability and your family reputation" (My translation). He reminds Aleya Begum how she has failed to be a good wife and a good mother. Even after knowing the reason why Aleya Begum took the decision to send Osman away, Mannaf fails to change his attitude and insists on keeping this a secret from Osman. His idea is that the son must not disrespect the father.

Mannaf's effort is to uphold masculinity. Nevertheless, being influenced, Aleya Begum gives in and tries to convince Osman that his father was the best father in the world. Osman says, "Can you blame a child for disrespecting the father if the father cannot retain the respect? How could you tell that after what he has done? Mother, you are well educated, you understand so much, still a superstition is there in you." Aleya Begum replies that it is not her superstition, it is the ghost. Here the meaning of ghosts becomes clear. The dark spots of the society are the ghosts that haunt each soul, and the most haunted are the women.

Aleya Begum's leaving her husband in the first year of their marriage gives rise to the discussion of divorce. A woman has the right to divorce according to Islamic 'shariah', which is included in the family law of Bangladesh judiciary system. Yet, many a times society or religious authority act against a woman's will to divorce her husband, even though he tortures her or he is polygamous, a gambler, or a drunk. In the name of 'fatwa' Bangladeshi society has already set examples of stoning women to death. Sultana Kamal, an advocate from Ain-o-Shalish Kendra, records a number of deaths and punishments:

In early 1993, a young domestic maid servant in Dhaka was reportedly accused of having a sexual relationship with her employer and both of them were sentenced to 25 lashes each. In January 1993 Maulana Mannan supported by village elders pronounced a *fatwa* sentencing a young woman Nurjehan Begum to public stoning in Chattokchora village in Sylhet district. She was accused of contracting an illegal second marriage though, according to reports, her first marriage had been duly declared dissolved. Nurjehan's parents were also held responsible for her 'illegal' second marriage and sentenced to 50 lashes each and Nurjehan's second husband was subjected to stoning. Nurjehan survived the stoning but committed suicide in utter indignation. (Lucas and Kapoor 1996: 69)



Photo: Rozina is asking Aleya Begum why a girl's life is so painful in this world. The answer is unknown but the victimization and its consequent reaction is visible in her complaint. (Source: DVD)

Beuvoir's objection to marriage and motherhood as a cause of women's 'emanence', as she points out that women yield mindlessly or they are being forced on to a path they never really choose. In this play, marriage is elaborately discussed and traditional marriage system is attacked. A girl usually doesn't have the freedom to choose her husband. The situation has widely changed in the urban areas among the educated families in Bangladesh, but the situation in the rural areas is still the same. Even a highly educated and employed woman cannot take a free decision. The fact becomes evident in Aleya begum's recalling of the past when she failed to go against her family's decision about her marriage. She feels that true marriage takes place between two equals and a girl should have the freedom to choose her life partner.

The play breaks the traditional concept of woman's nurturance. Even before Rozina knows who she is, she does not want to sacrifice her life for attending a patient like Osman. On the other hand, the sympathy and sentimental relationship between the two women are also noticeable. When Rozina learns everything about her identity and decides to leave the house, Aleya Begum asks, "Why are our lives like this?" She is not speaking for them only; she is speaking for women in general. The men's mutual understanding is also important.



Photo: Aleya Begum takes the position of the subaltern while the men are united. She seems to be utterly helpless in this men's world. (Source:DVD)

Rogina and Aleya Begum's intimacy is countered by the mutual sympathy and agreement between Entaz and Moulana Mannaf, and this takes place when they convince each other about the impurity of Rozina's mother.

The positions of the actors seem important. Aleya Begum and Rozina are very submissive to Moulana Mannaf, and he is given the upper bodily position. He stands erect, the women almost bow to him. On the other hand Osman staggers on the stage, and Entaz also falters when he walks. Both Osman and Entaz lack moral and physical strength that becomes obvious from their bodily gestures. When the two women talk to the two comparatively weak men, they are standing stout and the position is higher than that of the men, but whenever the men talk among them Aleya Begum stands aside or behind the wooden structure that looks like a wall, as if she cannot share the men's discussion.



Photo: A woman has no place in the aggressive discussion of men. Aleya Begum looks on passively while Moulana Mannaf and Osman are engaged in a debate. (Source: DVD)

The play also comments on political unrest and political leaders, as Entaz refers to a common slogan, "Lit fire on everything! Burn everything!" Rozina says that the so-called great men are all "boats that lost their sails!" and that she hates them. This is

again an attack on politics of patriarchy, and a woman comments on it. The 'Other' in the play is intended to spit at everything that makes life miserable. All these are indicative of an existing male culture and a gradual rise of gender awareness among the women.

Depending on the location and the people's culture the director decides how he will create the dramatic space to deliver his message. The *mise en scène* in Nilu's play is the one where Aleya Begum stares on and Osman sits with his hands stretched towards the window through which sunlight is coming, I think the whole message is there. Thousands of Bangladeshi men and women are waiting for light. They want enlightenment of soul, and freedom from the dark holes, but at the end only darkness prevails, and obviously gender discrepancy is a dark spot.

It has once again been proved that theatre can be a strong medium of delivering some message that coincides with the necessity of time and place.

After Words

The year 1996 had already witnessed the rise and fall of authors like Taslima Nasreen and Humayun Azad who were still the hotcake of discussion. On the other hand, Government and Non Government efforts were going on with a goal to achieving women's empowerment.

The Fourth World Conference on Women: Action for Equality, Development and Peace in Beijing from September 4 to 15, 1995 is a milestone in this regard. The principal themes of the conference were the advancement and empowerment of women in relation to women's human rights, women and poverty, women and decision-making, the girl-child, violence against women and other areas of concern. The outcome was the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action that were adopted by consensus on 15 September 1995. The Declaration embodies the commitment of the international community to the advancement of women and to the implementation of the Platform for Action, ensuring that a gender perspective is reflected in all policies and programmes at the national, regional and international levels. The Platform for Action sets out measures for national and international action for the advancement of women over the five years until 2000.

The overriding message of the Beijing Conference on Women was that the issues addressed in the Platform for Action are global and universal. It focused on the attitudes and practices that perpetuate inequality and discrimination against women in public and private life in all parts of the world. Accordingly, it recommended implementation that requires changes in values, attitudes, practices and priorities at every level. Governments and the UN agreed to promote the “mainstreaming” of a gender perspective in policies and programmes. The Conference indicated a clear commitment to international norms and standards of equality between men and women. The goals were to protect and promote the human rights of women and girl-children as an integral part of universal human rights.

I must admit that the local demand in relation to global perspective initiated the whole process, and monetary assistance from the embassy was just a constructive effort in that regard. Had there been no need for a play that spoke about women’s rights and freedom, it could never have evoked so much attention and criticism. All the progressive newspapers applauded the play, and some of the newspapers run by political parties that involved religion in power politics, were scornful. Theatre in a third world country like Bangladesh is never free of politics. *Krishnabibar* is part of our political theatre that emphasizes on gender equality, and it was an ‘event’ in 1996 that marked the necessity of time and reflected the cultural behaviour.

Chapter 4: *Putuler Itikatha*, Gender Marks the Key Understanding

If the remark that “It is impossible to imagine, in fact, that the first productions of *A Doll’s House* could have been received without reference to the “woman question” (Solomon 1997: 50) is true for Nineteenth century Europe, I strongly claim that it was equally impossible for Twentieth century South Asia, specifically, for Indian Subcontinent. In all the cultures of the world, Ibsen was used as a tool in the changing process, and as in Europe *A Doll’s House* was a symbol of women’s movement, so was in the other parts of the world.

Michael Meyer’s proclamation that “*A Doll’s House* has nothing to do with the sexes” (Meyer 1971: 266) is insubstantial as the play is at the same time a representative of individual freedom and gender inequality. There are debates on the topic. For example, Templeton herself denies the association of *A Doll’s House* with feminism:

Whatever propaganda feminists may have made of *A Doll’s House*, Ibsen, it is argued, never meant to write a play about the topical subject of women’s rights; Nora’s conflict represents something other than, something more than, woman’s. (Templeton 1997: 111)

A Doll’s House was first translated in Bangladesh by Abdul Huq in 1966, and it was titled *Putuler Sansar* (Doll’s Household). In the preface the translator wrote,

The moralizing society became alarmed imagining that this play may shatter the sanctity of marital life, and at one point, Ibsen agreed to change the ending of the play being pressurised by the pillars of society. That is mere history now. Abandoning the husband and household by Nora is neither a moral nor an ethical question anywhere in Europe or America; not in the progressive and educated Eastern societies as well. The question is only: are husband and wife equal, or not? (Huq 1966, ka)

Since the beginning of its advent in the Subcontinent, the play started asking the question: are husband and wife equal, or not? Templeton’s claim is a fact for the contemporary West that Nora’s conflict represents something other than, something more than, woman’s (Templeton 1997: 111), where the question has become invalid. Indian Subcontinent still finds this question of equality between the sexes important. Despite Shombhu Mitra’s emphasis on social institutions in general, *Putul Khela* (Playing with Dolls), therefore, posed the question in 1958 when it was premiered in West Bengal and later, when it was staged by Khan in Bangladesh in 1993; and

Putuler Itikatha (A Doll's History), in a sense poses the same question in Bangladesh after a long period in 2001.

How the play performed gender on the stage

Putuler Itikatha, although Nilu claims in his Director's Note that it is a translation, is more than that. I call it a recreation, and gender has influenced every bit of the Bangla play. A vast change and development has been noticed in this play in 2001, as Nilu has come a long way from the days of *Ghosts*. He has simultaneously broken the realistic frame of Ibsen's original play, and has become direct and spontaneous in his treatment of the theme, that is, 'gender conflict'. He has introduced three shadows of the protagonist who come and reflect Nora's innermost thoughts, her fears, her dreams and frustrations, etc. It is a non-realistic production with the addition of songs and choreography. There are fifteen songs altogether. The prologue, that has been identified as the major change brought to the original play motivated by gender issue, is a song. It, in a Brechtian way, alienates the audience by saying it is a play that they watch; and at the same time, it acts as a classical chorus as it expresses the theme and motif, i.e., gender. The lyrics go like this:

This is a game playing with dolls
This play has become a game for us
You have come to watch the game
You have come to watch the play

Men and women are playing the -
role of opposite parties
Who will win in this game of rights?
Win or defeat in this question of freedom.

It is a very interesting game
It is a game with dolls
This play raises questions
It is a very interesting game
It is a game with dolls
This play gives birth to civilizations
This play makes history.

Keeping one of the two humans in captivity
Keeping one of two humans as a doll
Slowly killing one of the two humans
What kind of a civilization is it?
What kind of a truth is it?
What kind of a social behaviour is it? - (My translation)

The song has posed the questions about the progress of civilization that keeps one of the two human races, namely the women, captive. It also indicates at the truth that lies behind this civilization's claim of the so-called social behaviour. I would say that Nilu is too direct in the play to keep the audience in a state of intense attention that the last scene usually mollifies. He reveals the secret in the beginning, and it has obviously been intentional to control the audiences' thoughts and direct them to the existing gender problems. The irony is that a very different treatment of the issue is observed in his Director's note.

Nilu, in his directorial note, claims that the major issue in the play is man-woman relationship and he writes,

My intention with the production is rather to raise questions, which are left to the audience to find an answer to, thereby also encouraging the audience to think about man-woman relationships in their own real world. (Programme Notes, 2001)

His note and his remarks during the interview I had with him (22.8.2008) reminds me of Julie Holledge's comment on the male film artists and directors in 1970s who have so far been sympathetic to Nora:

They seem to be critiquing the falseness of the gender construction of their societies, but removing the power factor. The conclusions they reach imply that men and women are both trapped by society's expectations and both must change. They are denying the very real advantages that men have derived from the subordinate position of women. (Personal correspondence, 29.7.2008)

Nilu seems to be sympathetic to Nora, but, nonetheless, fails to emphasize the trapped or suffocating situation she lives in, which he does beautifully in the play through the songs; and many a times he diverts to Kristine's privileged position. The play's prologue even goes to the point of asking question about the civilization or society that kills one of the two human races, but Nilu emphasizes on the union of Krogstad and Kristine. He claims that their relationship "emerges from a real life situation where both parties have their individuality and where actions and wrong doings of the past are expressed openly and accepted by the other party as a fact of life" (Programme notes, 2001). The stagecraft has shown both of the human races as puppets in the hands of some unknown force, avoiding the power imbalance between men and women.

He forgets to mention that in real life situation, there is no individuality for a woman, and actions and wrong doings of the past in Kristine's life did in no way make her free from the killing procedure. Kristine's union with Krogstad is yet another compromise of a woman with the symbolic order of the society: "a woman should not and cannot live happily alone." This is testified in the contradictory remarks made by Kristine. She tells Nora that she is not eager for children at all. On the other hand, she tells Krogstad that she needs children for her happiness and his children need a mother too. It is to be noted that Kristine is lying to either of them. I do not find any reason for her being hypocritical to Nora, where she shows a lot of carefulness while dealing with Krogstad. It is not very easy to comment on her activities in the play, but I find Nilu's Note rather guarded. Perhaps he did not want the conservative and religious minded Bangladeshi audience, who see marriage as a sacred religious and social institution, to be offended. At the end of his Note, he even claims that religion is not an issue in the play, and apparently, that is a fact for both the original and the translation. Still, religion, as a social institution, has been behind the very making of the power structure that has influenced the major events in the play.



Photo: The opening of the play where the human beings and the puppets are juxtaposed to show the captivity of the human race in general. Gradually men and women are separated on the stage that marks the division. (Source: DVD)

Right after the song, as part of the prologue, a man appears at the backstage on a staircase to address the audience in the Aeschelian manner, and he says, "This play

will pose questions, and the answers are known to you, we want solution, and that's why we pose questions, only questions, only questions" (my translation). This is rather an emphasis on the continuous asking process about rights, about freedom, and about humanity.

The play presented Nora as an extravagant woman whose husband has recently been promoted to the position of a bank manager. All newspaper reviews on the play shared the view that Nora is extravagant. In the original play, she is so, but I do not think she was so generally censured in Europe. Her blame was mostly for leaving the house and children, not for extravagance. What apparatus worked out in Bangladesh that made Nora such? I must mention that it is the society's tendency to find out a way to hold the woman responsible. Personally, as a spectator of the Bangla play, I believe Nora was not in a position to be extravagant. If we carefully judge her situation, we will see that it was really an illusion. Without a steady income, she had to go through tremendous financial pressure. With the money given by her husband, she had to spend for the house and also to save some to repay Krogstad. She had some income from sewing and so on, but that was probably very little.

Nora is more a middle class housewife in Bangladesh and different from the upper class dame in Norway. She is the daughter of a civil servant with a high position and married to another civil servant of similar status. She is living in a large and expensive flat and has a nurse for her children. Moreover, the tarantella also shows that she is from the upper class who dances at a party. Everything is evident of Nora's sharing the aristocracy. Despite all these, one subtle change in the opening of the play in the Bangla version can be evidence to my claim that Nora lives the life of a middle class housewife. Instead of the porter scene as in the original, the Bangla play introduces Nora's shadows. Porter is obviously a familiar term in Bangladesh, but they are usually hired at the bus or railway stations for carrying heavy luggage. A woman hiring a porter for carrying her purchased goods is not usual unless he is not the chauffeur of her car. It is rather customary in Bangladesh that the master of the house takes the driver, or hires a porter to accompany him in the markets, and carry his goods. In some cases the practice is usual for an upper class woman, but for a middle class housewife, it is not so. Probably, Nilu never thought of discriminating between

the upper and upper middle classes that are divided by a very thin line in everyday practices although ideological difference is vast between them.

I remember a scene from the Iranian film *Sara* based on *A Doll's House* directed by Dariush Mehrjui where Sara carried heavy boxes and pots full of goods that she had bought for her husband's party. Does it mean that outside the western world the women are working harder without recognition and sympathy? Krishna Sen (21.8. 2008) may truly have commented, "The interesting difference that makes it worse in the Sub continent than what you get in the play is that the Norwegian patriarchy insisted that the wife be treated properly." Sara was not in a position to be extravagant; neither Nora is in the Bangla play. Still, she has to go through the society's indictment that she is a spendthrift. The husband and wife are never treated equally, and the question raised by Abdul Huq in 1966 has never been solved during the ages as the unequal treatment of the sexes prevailed.

The Iranian courtyard works as a symbol for the irony of Sara's life. Nevertheless, the Iranian film insisted on the moral and physical strength of a woman while the Bangladeshi play reminds of the contemporary Bangladeshi women's situation; women, who are not financially so independent as to give a porter extra fifty coppers. This financial dependence has taken away all freedom from their lives. Nilu has tried to avoid any kind of specific geographical, national, and religious mark from her personality, but the raised finger of Torvald reminds of a Bangladeshi Husband, who says to his wife, "But Dear, I want you to be *my* bird only". (My translation)

In the original text, there is 'and' instead of 'but' where Torvald says, "And I couldn't wish you anything but just what you are, my sweet little lark" (Ibsen 1978:128). Helmer possesses Nora, and she is nothing but a captive. She could not even talk about her old friends to him, as he would become jealous. This is the typical effort of a husband to treat a wife as personal property, and in *Putuler Itikatha* the husband is more aggressive as a proprietor. His pointed finger tells us many things. The body language of an actor on the stage is very important, and Torvald's authoritative movements on the stage reassure that their household is his sovereignty, and Nora is nothing but a doll.



Photo: Torvald claims total submission from Nora, as he says that she must remain his bird. The pointed finger is a familiar expression of aggression and power. (Source: DVD)

In this play, gender issue has been presented in almost every scene. The body language and scenography are far more captivating than the dialogues that are less experimental. For example, the setting is double-spaced, and looks like a grand piano. A staircase connects the two-storied stage. Torvald's study seems to be on the upper stage, and Nora stays on the ground floor except in one scene. This acts as a physical structure that is gendered. The man is the owner of the higher rank and that is why he always stays on top, and the woman of the house attends her guests down, which is her abode. Nora does not call Torvald by his name on the stage. She prefers to call him 'Ei' that is more like 'Hey' in English. It is traditionally believed that a woman should not call the husband by his name, because he must be in a respectful position that the play observes this through the arrangement of the physical stage. Torvald occupies the upper floor, but Nora is allowed to go to the bedroom to share his bed. The sexual connotation is there, and a woman's position is more traditionally put on the stage. It becomes a Bangladeshi play despite the universality emphasized by the director.

Earlier in the second chapter, the gender structure as presented in *A Doll's House* or in *Putuler Itikatha* was explained as a power sharing between father and husband. Nora's position is that of an obedient and loving daughter, and of course, of a caring

and obedient wife. Her dead father, as mentioned by her husband, has left a legacy of characteristic feature in her that her husband must change in order to make his achievements complete. *Putuler Itikatha* initiates a more direct command on the husband's part, and this utterance by him is a good example. It has saved the day for the director whose audience already is familiar with the teachings of *Manu* or The *Quran*.

As of the first choral song, another song is presented right after Torvald's departure in the above-mentioned scene. Nora's shadows accompany her, and she sings:

I am lost; where am I?
I have come in this world taking birth as myself,
Everything is still a promise; all my virtues are counted as vices.
I am a doll inside these four walls; is it life? (My translation)



Photo: A women's place is separated from the man's as Nora takes refuge in the round shaped chair that represents womb or the earth. Her shadows surround her. (Source: DVD)

The upper floor has been used for two purposes. It is Helmer's study as well as their bedroom. That floor has been placed as a prison with a net around it. I find that this has two special significances. Torvald's study is his world, which is not open. His world is very narrow, and his thoughts are limited. His captivated mind has been the apparatus to keep Nora in captivity, and this is how the play's message that human beings are generally encaged, can be justified. Nevertheless, it does not diminish the double exploitation of the woman. Her world has been kept closed to her, and her struggle is for opening it.

Nora's body language is very expressive, and reminds of Kajal Bandyopodhyay's remark that women use sexual charm to attain their goals (Personal correspondence, 7.7.2008). Nora gets what she wants right after that; Torvald gives her money. This again proves that she could not spend money extravagantly as she had to go through utter humiliation for securing it.

Apart from the indoor physical labour to earn an extra penny, she also uses her physical charm, which is quite humiliating for her. The position of Nora as a submissive and hard working wife sets her as the representative of the emphasized femininity, and the gradual change in her is symbolic of the process of change in Bangladeshi women's attitude through the past decades. Her husband keeps the keys all by himself, and Nora has to use her hairpin for an unsuccessful effort to open the letterbox.



Photo: Nora is playing a doll wife with Torvald, and her aim is to get more money from him. (Source: DVD)

Financial dependence made her vulnerable in the beginning, and to get what she wanted, i.e., money, she used her physical charm at one point. Joan Templeton writes about Nora's changes through the play with reference to the acting of various actresses in her role:

For a hundred years, it has been argued that Nora Helmer is a difficult if not impossible part to play because there are two of her. The metamorphosis of the frivolous child-woman of Acts One and Two into a serious woman of Act Three

is claimed too rapid to be true. Ibsen sacrificed verisimilitude for message. (Templeton 1991: 121)

The presence of three shadows of Nora seems to be sharing the message that one Nora on the stage is not enough to show the different personalities that live within her. The shadows are accompanying her when she is desolate and when she probably recollects her whole life. Here again we remember that from the beginning Torvald's child-wife is capable of analysing that Torvald will be humiliated if he found out he had been in debt to her and that would have ruined their relationship. Nora complies with the doll role Templeton's remark that to flatter her husband and make her marriage 'work', but when after learning the truth Torvald despises her for it, she is forced to understand how she has humiliated herself.

Templeton rightly comments: "*A Doll's House* is not about a doll who turns into a woman, but about a woman who renounces being a doll. Playing Nora means playing a woman catching up with herself" (ibid: 122). In the Bangla play, Tahmina Sharif's acting makes it clear from the beginning that she is not a doll wife. She plays the role to just to make her marriage 'work'. She takes refuge in the round shaped chair, which symbolizes the womb or the world, and her composure is enough to express the reality behind her doll mask.



Photo: Helmer is literally alluring Nora with money in an envelop as she looks on with satisfaction. (Source: DVD)

In a song she asks Torvald, “Tell me, shall I get or not what I want?” It becomes clear that he knows what she wants as he brings out an envelop full of money instantly. Thus, their usual practice of playing with money is enacted on the stage. It is rather shameful to watch the whole episode. He dwindles the envelop before her face, and she looks at it with mesmerized eyes. This episode leads to the episode of Nora’s utter disgust. Her body is seen as a commodity, which may be bought with money. The tarantella night compliments her life with ultimate humiliation.

Robert Brustein’s comment that “Nora’s abrupt conversion from a protected, almost infantile dependant into an articulate and determined spokesman for individual freedom may serve the drama of ideas but it is totally unconvincing in the drama of action” (Brustein 1964: 49, Templeton 1991: 121) and it has been true once again. In the Bangla play, Nora is voluntarily playing the doll until she is forced to give up the mask, and become herself.

As a Bangladeshi woman, I have the experience that men do not usually talk about cooking, sewing, cleaning, or other household activities that are considered women’s subjects. Women are part of men’s possessions and they are fond of displaying their wives. When Torvald brings Nora downstairs from the party, and declares that he is full of desires for her, Nora’s face is so lowered that she does not need to say how humiliated she feels. He also displays her beauty and asks Kristine, “Behold her well, isn’t she beautiful? Actually, she is so beautiful that her beauty can be proudly talked of (My translation).” It is quite the same as in the English text, but in the same scene, Torvald talks about embroidery and knitting which has been dropped out in the Bangla play.

Nora’s tarantella is not transformed into anything else in *Putuler Itikatha*. When Mitra staged *A Doll’s House* in 1958, he replaced the dance with a poem by Nora’s recitation of a poem by Rabindranath Thakur (usually known by the old English version of his last name Tagore). The poem is ‘Jhulan’ that has been translated as “Swaying” in the Oxford edition of the poems. The poem goes on like this:

I will play with my soul today
A game of death

Deep in the night.
 Pouring rain, a darkling sky,
 Behold all sides in torrents cry,
 On the world's wave with dire joy
 I float this raft of mine;
 Scorning my bed of dreams I come
 Out in the storm
 In the night-time.

Face to face, my soul and I
 Today, all shame and fear laid by,
 Will know each other, breast to breast,
 On rapture's wing:
 Swing, swing! (Tagore 2004: 77)

Nora's departure at the end beautifully matched with "Scorning my bed of dreams I come - Out in the storm- In the night-time," and the theatrical device got significance. On the other hand, in *Putuler Itikatha* the dance was kept as in the original. Tahmina Sharif, however, could not enact the physical appeal of the dance. I find that the absence of Nora's frenzy and momentary possession in the Bangla play has damaged the tarantella's appeal. This again proves that a performance does not get significance if it strictly follows the source without considering the cultural context and the ability of the performers.

In the original or in the English versions, Torvald talked about her dance and its effect on the onlookers when he tried to explain why he had to bring her down from the party. The reason was clear enough that he wanted that the trance of her dance remain there among the beholders and he was feeling jealous. Instead, the Bangladeshi Torvald has grinded his teeth in anger while talking about how the onlookers made a hullabaloo seeing his wife's wild dance. His jealousy and anger has instigated his desires, and this attitude is common in the local culture. Either the director or his natural understanding of a husband's attitude made him act as a sneering husband at that moment which is unlike the original play where Torvald is more passionate but less angry. He is also turned into a middle class man with a narrow mind instead of

the upper class Norwegian Government official who is able to take the reception of his wife's dance openly.

Any spectator who has some idea of women's situation in Bangladesh would understand that a woman changes herself when she is pushed hard on the wall. Nora is aware that her physical charm is a commodity, and uses it while needed until Krogstad threatens to take away her life's happiness. I find the bodily positions of Nora as an expression of what women experience during such hours. An unemployed woman who has to depend on the husband's money using her physical charms to get what she wants; and at hours when her innermost thoughts are preoccupied with something grave and dangerous, if the husband desires her body, she must have the feeling of a captive animal.

Nora feels that in *Putuler Itikatha*, and that initiates her thoughts about her whole life spent with Torvald. It can be argued that Nora in Norway is an upper class woman and is not expected to work as she is not raised and educated for any work, not even in the household. Bangladeshi upper class women are mostly so; but in many cases, they have been the pioneer for education, civil services, and business. Begum Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain, who was a Muslim feminist and was the pioneer of female education in Bengal, is a good example of this. The female entrepreneurs in Bangladesh are also from the upper and upper middle classes. Thus, Nora's inactivity and coquettish behaviour for money evoke confusion about her upbringing and identity. It becomes difficult to fix her within a social rank.

It is evident that Helmer does not give her the scope to think anything else except his desires. When she asks him if he wants her at a moment when his close friend Dr. Rank is dying, he answers in the positive emphasizing on the need of recovering from the dark events that have eclipsed his personal life. This is again a deviation from the original, as in the original he says:

You're right. We've both had a shock. There's ugliness between us – these thoughts of death and corruption. We'll have to get free of them first. Until then – we'll stay apart. (Ibsen 1978:186)



Photo: Nora lowers her face as Torvald says that he desires her at the night of tarantella to get rid of the shadows of Rank's death that has eclipsed his mind. The humiliation and grudge are visible on her face. (Source:DVD)

The episodic change in Nora is representative of Connell's theory of gender transformation; it is an example of how women turn into resistant femininity from emphasized femininity. A blend of gender with the cultural nuisances has worked out the transformation of Helmer into a more aggressive and conservative husband in the Bangla play, and similarly Nora has become the epitome of Bangladeshi women's resistance against the aggression of male culture. When she speaks about her past life with her father and her husband, the local female audience easily understand about what she talks.

The little girl presented in the opening scene becomes important if she is considered the representative of Nora's childhood. Nora remembers how her father kept her as a doll, and never let her think freely. After her marriage, Helmer has treated her in the same way. None of them ever considered her needs or wishes. She has been deprived of education, and she has not known herself too. Freedom of thought has been given the utmost importance that the women lack. Nora accuses her father and her husband for this captive situation of hers and thus the question of hegemonic masculinity in the form of father figures become the target of accusation. Helmer is also a father, and he has already presented his ego by his denial of sharing of the children's custody with Nora. The necessity of a mother has been discarded from two points, one in the

absence of Nora's mother and the other in the claim of Helmer that the children will no longer be under her guidance.

After Words about *Putuler Itikatha*

It is evident that the sixty three performances of the play provided for the women artists and women in the audience a scope "of moving beyond the hegemony of their cultural frameworks to question and disrupt the gender constructions that bind them" (Hollidge & Tomkins, 2000: 177). CAT published a Survey Report where six hundred people who watched the performances gave their opinions. Among those six hundred people, forty-two percent was female and thirty-seven percent of the total thought that the play was the best among the plays staged in the country on the themes of deception and humiliation the women experience. One hundred and eight persons thought that it was a play about the present and the future though it had been written more than one hundred years ago. Seventy-seven percent of the audience even commented that more plays like that should be staged. Sajeda Akter, a twenty six year old woman who watched the play at the Guide House on 19.10.2002 commented, "We have been hypnotized by the message of this play which is against the process of making us dolls of the house" (My translation).

The actor who played the lead role of Nora, Tahmina Sharif, commented to a newspaper reporter, "Nora is a simple young woman who loves her husband enormously and wants to help him in every way. However, she has no freedom of thought and this is where the problem begins. I enjoyed all the sequences and coming to CAT I've learnt that acting is something to be enjoyed and it is not all 'acting for acting's sake.'" She also shared a personal anecdote: her parents did not approve of her acting, but she could carry on with CAT because her husband did not have any objections. (*The Daily Star*, 5.6.2001) In Tahmina's absence, Sabina Sultana, one of Nora's shadows in the initial productions, played the role of Nora. This young woman was full of excitement about Ibsen's plays while I asked her why she was keen on acting in Ibsen's plays. She specially referred to her private life; her divorced mother brought her up; her father was a drug addict and he used to torture her mother during their married years and she, as a child, was a witness. She commented on how men oppress women and she was fond of Ibsen as he spoke about women's oppression and inequality in the society (Sultana, personal correspondence, 10.7.2008).

With due respect to Sultana's innermost feelings, I admit that this emotion is so far been re-echoed during Ibsen performances in almost every society where women are subordinated by social injustice. Ibsen has become a spokesperson of the oppression done to them, and they have learnt to pose questions about hegemony. The West and Bangladesh have worked together to deliver a single message: 'human being should be freed'. Women, as part of the exploited mass, have their share in this negotiation. The Otherness of woman has clearly been demonstrated. The social institutions that take active part in this exploitation has been criticised despite a tendency on the part of the male director to act according to the established social order. The staging of *Putuler Itikatha*, thus judged, is an event that combines two different cultures for the unique purpose of realising Ibsen's dream about the future when there will be no discrimination between the human races.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

My view about Nora's appeal in Bangladesh is resonated in a conference paper by one my respected teachers at Dhaka University, Professor Shawkat Hussain:

The point is obvious: Ibsen's reputation in Bangladesh rests upon the notoriety of Nora's character and action [...] It is enough to realize that the play in which Nora figures as a character contains enough problematic issues still topical in different cultural contexts in Asia. By an incredible literary legerdemain, Nora has begun to float outside the specific historical, political and social context that gave her birth; Nora has become "Everywoman," almost a "permanent fixture" on the agenda of Bangladesh. (Hussain 2006: 214)

At the outset, I claimed that I am my own judge, as I strongly share the gender interest as a Bangladeshi woman. My understanding of the performances is, therefore, important to me. Except the explicit messages in the plays, I have also noticed that in both *Krishnabibar* and *Putuler Itikatha*, the important discussions related with creativity, an integral part of the original plays, have been ignored. Oswald's inability to create anymore does not get any meaning in the Bangla play, but in the West, this was an important issue. The relative importance on gender roles and function of religion in women's oppression undermined that discussion. On the other hand, Nora's famous tarantella has lost the significance in the Bangla play. The first remarkable and popular Bangla production that is Shombhu Mitra's *Putul Khela* transformed the dance party into a poetry session where Nora recited the poem 'Jhulan' by Rabindranath Thakur. In *Putuler Itikatha* the dance has been kept as in the original. The idea of incorporating the Tarantella to keep the sensation of the dance does not flourish in the play. I find that the absence of Nora's frenzy and momentary possession in the Bangla play has damaged the dance's appeal. The overt messages in the songs have dented the message of the dance.

Krishna Sen (personal correspondence, 21.8.2008) emphasised on the fact that tarantella is usually danced by possessed women, and Nora could not have made to dance anything else except that; but as Nora in this production never shows a sign of possession, the frenzic dance loses its meaning in her personality. Bangladeshi Nora cannot get away with frenzy, as the punishment is death. The motive of not making Nora a Bangladeshi woman by avoiding the use of local costumes for her attires is related with the same idea of keeping the dance sequence as something universal.

Nevertheless, the dance fails Nilu because performance reflects the locality and it is an 'event' that is enacted by the actors and audience. Bangladeshi actor who played Nora's role was unable to enact the body language that was needed for it, and the local audience had no operative mind that was receptive of a tarantella.

The obvious reasons for the emphasis on the social issues, instead of on aesthetics in the two plays are rooted in the contemporary social context. This conflict regarding freedom in both *Krishnabibar* and *Putuler Itikatha* turns into a discussion of gender that stormed into the oeuvres of contemporary writers and teachers like Taslima Nasreen, Ahmed Sharif, Humayun Azad, etc. were fuelling it. Azad's book *Naari* influenced Nilu's *Krishnabibar*, the adaptation of *Ghosts*. *Naari*, published in 1992 and banned between 1995 and 2000, had a strong impact on both the society and the play. *Putuler Itikatha* was also influenced by the discussions regarding these writers. Ahmed Sharif is another writer who gave rise to the question of religious authority forced on human life. Until his death in 1999, he remained a controversial writer in the country because of his unguarded critiques of the establishment.

On the other hand, the whole decade of the 1990s was a restless time regarding Nasreen's feminist writings that faced a strong government and public backlashes. In 1991, her book *Selected Columns* was published and Islamic fundamentalists continued their protests and demonstrations against her throughout the country that had actually started a year earlier when cases were filed against her because she criticized Islamic oppression on women. In 1993, her journalistic novel *Lajja*, a protest against the oppressions on minority community was published and the same year the government of Bangladesh banned it. Islamic fundamentalists issued fatwa against her and set a price for her head. The next year, her books started being published in many European languages. The same year in 1994 the Government of Bangladesh filed a case against her on the charges of hurting religious feelings of the people. She absconded as a non-bail able arrest order was issued against her. The whole decade restlessly witnessed her rise and fall, and consequently women's issues got new wave of treatments. Nora's story must have had some strong impact on contemporary debates.

Nasreen's case triggered off a mixed kind of feeling among the people. The religious mass of the country passed the verdict that she was wrong. Even among the intellectual class, there was division. A large group still feels that she is a mediocre who has been nurtured by the West, and it has been wrong to treat her with so much importance. I cite a comment on Taslima Nasreen made by a Mohammad Gani on 8 September, 2008, that shows a more or less general and prejudiced opinion about her:

There is nothing decent and honorable about this iconoclast's idolatrous hyperbole who is riding on immoral and cyanic sarcasms those shall engender more indignity, pandemonium and compunction to our women society. Those of us, who believe in "morality" that helps separating right from wrong is unscientific and not logical, thus should not even exist; must be either ascribing to the morality of the animal kingdom or deceiving their own mind. Her illusory messages toward women's equal rights are implacable and "unproven truth" in our culture/society including women society. Our women society could never be proselytized by these inconsequential ideals and vagaries under the tutelage of liquidated Taslima Nasrin.

(<http://bangladeshwatchdog.blogspot.com/2008/09/taslima-nasreen-intercepting-lonely.html>, visited on 5.3.2009 at 13:25)

Instead of accelerating women's interest, she introduced more debates regarding the good and evil of awareness. Women, as it seemed, antagonised religion, if they wanted to get free. Nora, at the end of the play, says that she does not care for religion, which has failed her. It could have been a dangerous message for the local spectators, had not Nilu shown her as a woman in Western costumes, and with a Western name.

However, in 1996, Nilu favoured to make Mrs. Alving a Bangladeshi woman who would raise her voice in support of freedom of the mind and education against the social institutions that oppress a human soul. Her aggressive debate with Pastor Manders was just a timely need in local and global perspectives. I would not mention the hundreds of cases that are witness to women's punishment by the social or religious authorities in Bangladesh during the past decades, because most of them had extramarital or illicit affairs as offences. Blasphemy would have been a worse crime for women. 'Fatwa' is an important element against the struggle of women's emancipation as orthodox religion had always viewed gender issues to lie within their jurisdiction. Taslima Nasreen survived because of the publicity, the foreign interest and the support of a few who rose to defend the rule of law. Many other women were not as fortunate as she was; and most of the cases would show that either the victims

committed suicide out of shame for the utter injustice done to them, or they were stoned to death (Lucas and Kapoor, 1996). Thus, when Aleya Begum departs from the character of Mrs. Alving as a more aggressive freedom fighter for the cause of woman or Rozina becomes stronger orally and physically, it must be acknowledged that this is the way they were needed to be shown.

Nilu claimed during the interview (personal correspondence, 22.10.2008) that he always looked at theatre from a socio-political perspective. He was not doing it from 'agitation propaganda' (he was referring to Brechtian 'agit prop' theatre) but he always had a social ideology while directing any play. In his own words:

When I choose a play, I always see how important the play is for my society and my country. I think how I can match it with my socio-political context. I choose the playwrights from that angle. I read Ibsen's *An Enemy of the People* when I was a student. I felt that he talked about the problems of my country which were the problems centring on capitalism, conflicts within the family, etc. I never felt that Ibsen is an outsider. There might be difference in structural point of view, but the essence and language of his plays are so close that I took them as part of life, not part of theatre. (Nilu, personal correspondence, 22.10.2008, my translation)

Nilu mentioned that when he directed *Krishnabibar*, a strong religious power was at play in Bangladesh. At that time, while reading *Ghosts* he found that the play could be very interesting in that context. He did not deconstruct Ibsen much. He kept almost everything as it was, like the relationship between Osman and his mother, Rozina. The sexual exploitation of a maid by the master of the house is a regular phenomenon in Bangladesh. Therefore, Mr. Alving's relation with Regine's mother was also kept intact. He recalled events in Sylhet and Dhaka regarding maids' pregnancy because of forceful seduction by the masters, and consequent punishment of the girls by the local priests to show how events in *Ghosts* mirrors our society.

At this point, it is necessary to mention the attempts made by the Jamaat-i-Islami, a political party using religion as their tramp card, to pass a bill on Blasphemy Law in the Parliament. The bill was proposed in 1992 and tabled in 1993, but it was not successful at the end. The extremists even targeted a Bengali daily, the *Janakantha*, which since the beginning of the year had relentlessly tried to expose the persons involved in and the factors behind the rise of *fatwabaz* (those who announce a decree) in the country. In an editorial in the 12th May 1994 issue, while the *Janakantha*

showed how orthodox and illiterate mullahs were misinterpreting the *Quran* and the *Hadith*, the Islamists alleged that this specific article had offended the religious sentiments of the Muslim community and called upon the government to bring charges against its editor. The government picked out the issue and filed a case against the editor (Atiqullah Khan Masud), the advisory editor (Toab Khan), the executive editor (Borhan Ahmed), and an assistant editor (Shamsuddin Ahmed) of the newspaper under Section 295A of the country's Penal Code.

If that could happen to a newspaper in a country like Bangladesh that claims secularism, it is not difficult to imagine what could happen to a Bangladeshi Nora who says –“I'm really not sure what religion is” (Ibsen 1978:193) and “I only know what the minister said when I was confirmed. He told me that religion was this thing and that. [...] I'll see if what the minister said was right, or, in any case, if it's right for me.” (ibid: 193) Mrs. Alving is a little less radical than Nora as she does not totally deny the influence of religion, as it is evident in her submission to Pastor Manders in many respects. Nevertheless, Bangladeshi Mrs. Alving uttered in 1996 that she would not accept the decree of a Muslim priest in regards of her duties and responsibilities. She also suggested that she would read to know more. Obviously, the plays represent contemporary reality and norms, as according to the ideas of Carlson and Bharucha regarding theatre.

Nilu has claimed that he tried to universalize Nora's identity, and the gowns used as her costumes have been a fitting way to do that. I do not believe that any spectator would accept Nora's gowns as a dress worn in the Subcontinent in general. It is Western, but whatever Nora says on the stage echoes the language of the Bangladeshi women seeking expression of her pain. Nobody can blame the director of any offence to the religious feelings of the public, as outwardly she is quite distinctive from any woman in Bangladesh. The purpose of ringing the bell has been served without offending anyone in particular.

While interviewing some persons connected with Ibsen or *A Doll's House*, I have had very interesting observations. The males, including the director, somehow or other opined that the emphasis on gender is a kind of misreading of the play. Nilu was radical in 1996, and attacked the social institutions for injustice. In 2001, he was

rather cautious. He emphasized on the fact that he wanted to uphold the marriage institution, and he wanted to show how men and women could make a proper home if they had true understanding ignoring the fact that true understanding between men and women requires a balance of power which has not been attained in our society. He indicated at the reunion of Krogstad and Kristine Linde, as has been discussed earlier, although the play could not convince that their union was based on true understanding.

It reminds me of some influential critics mentioned by Solomon who insist, “We overlook the gender of Ibsen’s female characters, that we leap immediately to a supposedly neutral image of the universal human being (Solomon 1997: 49).” Khaled Khan, who directed the play *Putul Khela* in Bangladesh in 1993 in Mitra’s translation, said that it is harmful for any artistic creation to look for the social issues with too much emphasis. He also suggested that the play should be looked at from a gender-neutral point of view (Khan, 28.06.2008). Is it possible to create theatre only for theatre’s sake in a third world country like Bangladesh? I agree with the major theatre critics that theatre is essentially and always, political. Moreover, I want to add that theatre, in the third world countries, is unimaginable without any connection with power politics.

Bengali women, Muslim or Hindu, were secluded inside, and only a handful of them had access to social spheres, as history tells us. ‘Purdah’ was strictly maintained among the aristocratic women, but it was also a custom among the other classes. Women, in general, were kept out of the view of outsiders; worshipping and praying, obeying the husbands, child rearing, cooking for the family, and keeping their chastity were their daily responsibilities. According to the patriarchal social order, their husbands controlled their movements, and they could not take any decision or could not do anything for earning.

Since the 90s gender gaps emerged in progress made on all Millennium Development Goals in Bangladesh, and needs were felt to understand how these gaps could be eliminated. (Thomas and Lateef 2004: 11) Various progresses on gender relations were being scrutinised closely by the Government and Non- Government

organisations. Gender discussions in the field of arts and cultures got momentum because of the emergence of radical writers like Nasreen, Sharif, Azad etc.

Being asked if there was any relation between Ibsen practice in Bangladesh and the women's movement, Sonia Nishat Amin, Professor of History and Gender Studies, commented by quoting Marx that art and culture are always related with real life. It is visible in the theories of aesthetics and history. Art and culture are created by society and their impact returns to society. While *A Doll's House* was first introduced in Kolkata, there was a question regarding women's rights. In our country, in the 80s, the women's movement was at a developing stage. Not only in Bangladesh, in whole South Asia starting from Nepal to Sri Lanka, everywhere Nora was a symbol of a woman who could break the shackle. When the women's movement was on a high tide, this play gave strength. (Amin, personal correspondence, 7.7.2008)

The first international Ibsen seminar and workshop in Dhaka can be a witness to my claim. The seminar's title was 'Gender Issues in Ibsen's Plays.' The speakers showed an ambivalent attitude to the issue. Aatur Rahman, a prominent theatre director, tried in many ways to say that Ibsen has become part of Bengali and Bangladeshi theatre culture mostly because of his philosophy and the artistic quality of his plays. Still, he had to acknowledge: "We tend to be inspired by Ibsen's morally muscular women in our male-dominated society who not only are struggling for their rightful share as equals with men but also for a humanistic world of peace, honesty, faith, love and human rights" (Rahman 1997: 24). Rahman wanted to see Nora as a "trend-setter in changing the Victorian world order" and she became "a martyr for the cause," yet Rahman could not deny the fact that "Ibsen's Nora is still a champion of feminist cause in the developing world and not fully dead as the torch-bearer of the same cause in the developed world." (ibid: 23)

Vigdis Ystad, a scholar from Norway, wrote

Given the clearly realistic imprint of plays such as *A Doll's House* and *Ghosts*, it seems natural enough to interpret Nora's and Mrs. Alving's rebellion as a rebellion against conditions in the society of their time. In that case, their rebellion occurs as a claim to equal social rights for men and women. (Ystad 1997: 51)

In his time, Ibsen had to write about the rights of women, which is evident in the 1884's letter signed by Ibsen, Bjørnson, Alexander L. Kielland, Jonas Lie that asked the parliament to take strong measures to introduce a new law on women's property (related with marriage) rights. (Ibsen 1979: 276) It is evident that Norway no longer holds women within the four walls of household, nor there any oppression on women regarding property exists. On the other hand, Bangladesh still needs to revise the property law that was initiated by the interim Caretaker Government last year in March as mentioned in chapter three. Thus can be deducted that Noras or Mrs. Alvings are still fighting for their freedom and rights in the country. The existing scholarship on Ibsen also points to that.

Subsequent to all discussions, to sum up the fact if it was the Norwegian money that initiated interest in Ibsen, I must say that the interest has always been there as the fundamental needs regarding rights and justice never ceased to exist. Freedom of the nation in 1971 was followed by a need for elimination of all kinds of injustice, and consequently women issues were given importance. Need for women's freedom and empowerment was locally initiated by the educated women and sympathetic men. On the other hand, global events like International Women's Conferences (i.e. in Mexico and Beijing) emphasized on the universality of women's emancipation process. Moreover, local feminist authors gave the discussion a more politicised form.

I claimed in my hypothesis that there have been other interests than Norwegian money for promoting Ibsen in Bangladesh. Nilu (personal correspondence, 22.10.2008) has also remarked that he found out that he could get some financial assistance from the Royal Norwegian Embassy in Dhaka. He was already interested in staging Ibsen, as he thought that through Ibsen some ongoing ills of our society could be drawn into attention. His chose *Ghosts* mainly because of that, a fact he mentions in his Director's Note in the play's programme notes.

In a third world country where people still die without food, it is illogical to ask for total devotion for theatre if money is not involved. Khaled Khan, director of *Putul Khela* in Bangladesh, grudged against the part time acting in Bangladesh that has harmed theatre practice (Khan, personal correspondence, 28.06.2008). Khan's *Putul Khela* could not continue due to limitations associated with staging like lack of a

proper stage, lack of money that pressurised the artiste to go for other jobs. After that, in 1996 Bangladeshi theatre formally reintroduced Ibsen with *Krishnabibar*.

CAT had their debut with *Krishnabibar* with Norwegian money. I talked with some of the artistes of CAT to see if they were pushed to deliver any message outside the text. They were not. However, they have expressed their satisfaction over their regular monthly income for acting. According to them, the money they get from the organisation does not depend on the performance of any particular play, or do not come from regular grants from a foreign country. Initially they depended on donations, and with that they have developed infrastructure and the organisation now runs independently. The salary gives them the opportunity to act full time while the artistes in the other theatre groups in Bangladesh are mostly amateurs who act part time. This reconfirmed that acting needs full time devotion and a smooth income through acting can ensure that devotion.

Khan also criticised the Royal Norwegian Embassy's donation for Ibsen performances (personal correspondence, 28.06.2008). According to him, while earlier Ibsen's plays were staged out of love, these days none will stage Ibsen without money. He became pensive while musing on the fact that money cannot create art. I agree with him, but I do not believe that money has had anything to do with the reception of these two plays. The ground work for their reception was already done by the activists of women's lib movements. The injustice accorded to women and the natural mindset to see the gender interests in any event was already there.

Monetary exchange in connection with cultural exchange indicates at the influence of money, but in staging Ibsen's plays the primary reasons have always been socio-political. Norway's interests are apparently development in the underdeveloped sectors and gender is one the main underdeveloped sectors in Bangladesh. In 2006 Norwegian Government allocated a big budget to celebrate Henrik Ibsen's Death centennial all over the world, and Bangladesh became a partner in that project. It was a way to promote the name of a Norwegian dramatist to the public of Bangladesh. Money is an important factor in the contemporary soft diplomacy. However, it becomes necessary to justify the exchange of money. Ibsen's plays have their own justification in being a part of cultural and economic exchanges.

I, as a scholar financed by Norwegian State Education Loan Fund, could not decide how to get myself acquitted of the blame of promoting my financier. I am doubly accused, because I am a woman. I am sure that my views will bring forth further arguments in this never-ending debate. I must mention that the process I went through during the last few months has given me an insight into the social and cultural arena of Bangladesh and I have learnt that “Theatre is neither a text nor a commodity. It is an activity that needs to be in ceaseless contact with the realities of the world and the inner necessities of our lives.” (Bharucha 1993: 10) Pavis’s ‘target’ and ‘source’ cultures have blended the respective theatre norms into a female Utopia for me where the dream of equality between men and women may possibly be realised. Like Fischer-Lichte and Bharucha, I also have the same conviction in the transformative power of performance and believe that the days may come when it will be possible to change our lives through theatre.

Bangladeshi theatre has appropriated Ibsen to represent and reinforce local cultural norms, and money could not do anything if the interest were not already there. In Bakhtin’s words Ibsen’s plays are found relevant in Bangladesh, thanks “to the intentional potential embedded in them.” In our “social and ideological re-accentuation” of Ibsen, he speaks what we want to hear. In our re-accentuation he tells the truth about the changes in our social life where the power structure needs to be balanced. He tells us how relations are influenced by the capitalist approach towards life. He shows how women are made commodities in an unjust way. We find all these in our daily lives. That is why Ibsen has become someone quite intimate. Gender awareness has been the most important among the many socio-political reasons and our re-accentuation of that has brought him so close to us.

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